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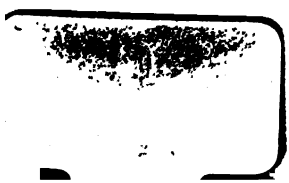

VIRGINIA COTTAGE.

MISTS AND SHADOWS.

BY

GEORGE E. SARGENT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE MARSDENS;' 'FRANK LAYTON;' 'STORY OF A POCKET BIBLE;' ETC.

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PREFACE.

THIRTY-FIVE years ago the writer of 'Mists and Shadows' commenced writing a story which never was finished, and never will be.

About twenty years ago he took pen in hand again, and, in the course of the two or three following years, wrote a number of stories, which had in them so far the elements of popularity, that they were pretty freely pirated.

After this he wrote a variety of books for children, which had the merit or good fortune of pleasing those for whom they were written. Concurrently with these publications, he also wrote several books of a more practical character, which answered, and are still answering, the purpose for which they were designed.

About ten years ago he recommenced story telling; or rather devoted a larger portion of time and attention to it than before. From that time to the present he has written short stories and long stories, which have been read, as he is given to understand, in almost every place where the English language is spoken.

During the twenty years of authorship thus briefly glanced at, the writer has in most instances appeared before the public anonymously; and a reviewer has recently hazarded a surmise that he is a young man.* This happens to be erroneous.

* In a review of 'The Marsdens, or Struggles in Life.'

Nevertheless, the author is glad to find that, even to a professional critic, his writings still manifest the vigour of youth. But, building a theory of his own on his mistaken assumption, the reviewer parentally advises the author to avoid, in his future works, imitating a popular novelist, whose name—though a household word—has no right to be used on every slight occasion.

The writer of 'Mists and Shadows' has simply to say that he has never imitated the style or borrowed the sentiments of another. Contemporary in age, and almost in young authorship, with the gentleman referred to by the reviewer, he chooses to think his own thoughts and write his own words in his own way. If anything he ever wrote, however, could give countenance to the accusation of his being a copyist of the respected writer, it might possibly be found, or fancied, in the unfinished manuscript of *thirty-five years ago*.

Having thus disposed of this merely personal matter, the writer would only add that, as in his graver moments it has been his desire to blend amusement with instruction, so now, while indulging in a lighter strain, he has endeavoured to blend instruction with amusement. And as, in olden times, the teller of legendary tales, as well as the minstrel and ballad-singer, was welcomed to hearths from which at other seasons he might have been frowned away, so the author hopes to be received into many a diverse and diversified circle around a Christmas fire.

Whitfield, near Dover;
December, 1860.

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piercing black eyes, and a hectic flush on his cheeks, which otherwise were very pale; I know this shadow to be my father; also that he was the vicar of that shadowy little church, and the occupant of the equally shadowy parsonage house.

These shadows fade away as I attempt to embody them; and others rise.

These are the shadows of a chamber; an elderly woman whom I take to be a nurse; a yet more elderly gentleman, with a powdered wig and ruffled wristbands; and I see, or think I see an expression of concern on his countenance, as he turns from the shadow of a bed, and whispers a few words to the old woman before gliding away, as a shadow should, with noiseless footsteps.

Then the curtains of that bed are drawn aside; and I see the shadow of a sick lady—a dying woman; and another shadow by her side. The first is youthful; the second is that of a child not above four years old. There are tears, I think, on the cheeks of the first, as the boy puts his arms round her neck, and says,—"When will you get well, mother?"

I know what these shadows mean: I see in them my mother and my own self.

More shadows. An open grave; a coffin and a pall; a group of mourners; a surpliced priest—

not my father, this —; I feel the cold grasp of a shadowy hand; I look round and up, and I see my father by my side, but so changed, so changed!—and we two stand by the grave. I look down and see the white coffin-plate on the black lid; but a mist comes before my eyes, and I cannot read the inscription. The mist rises higher, and spreads wider, and becomes thicker: and the shadows are lost.

Shadows again! The interior of a church with great clumsy arches, and whitewashed walls on which are three marble tablets. One of them reads thus—

Sacred

TO THE MEMORY OF

ALICE,

THE BELOVED WIFE OF THE REV.

SIDNEY BELL,

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE AUGUST 3D, 1795, IN THE TWENTY FOURTH YEAR OF HER AGE, AND IS COMMITTED TO THE DUST, IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION TO

ETERNAL LIFE

THROUGH OUR

LORD JESUS CHRIST.

This marble tablet was placed there two months after I had stood by the open grave; and it has been there a year and a month. I have read it very often; I have learned it by heart.

It is a cold, misty, foggy day in November. A

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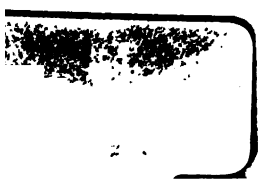

other way, and then I should lose the credit of it; or they would tell some abominable lies about me, as if I could have helped it. Hillo! Sidney, you here, too? Here, suck them," and Mr. Tibletts threw a little handful of lozenges across the table. "Stop, though, there's physic in them —— perhaps."

The boy (being myself) arrested himself in the act of conveying one of the lozenges to his mouth, and looked attentively and suspiciously at the apothecary. But seeing a twinkle in his eye, he took courage and bolted the lozenge, and then took another.

"You thought you would let us know, Mr. Tibletts," said Aunt Martha again, with the slightest infusion of curiosity possible, and looking the gentleman in the face.

"You know Mrs. Slokum, I think," said he.

The "three Graces" said yes.

"I don't like that woman," said the apothecary.

"We all know that, Mr. Tibletts. You have said that very often."

"And you don't like her either, Miss Lawson; nor you, Miss Martha; nor you, Miss Mary; it is not in nature that you should. You can't like her."

"I am sure you have never heard us say so, sir," observed Aunt Elizabeth, gravely.

"No, that would not be in nature either. But you don't like her."

"You did not come to tell us that, did you, Mr. Tibletts?"

"Hem! It is part of my story, at all events. You don't know—that is, you didn't know that woman's lodgers, I suppose?"

"We have seen them, if you mean Captain Warren and his pretty little wife; and we should be glad to know them, but ——"

"Ah, well; you will never know them now, I suppose."

"Have they left Greenhurst, Mr. Tibletts?" asked Aunt Mary.

"Captain Warren left Greenhurst a month ago, Miss Mary," said the apothecary.

"You are very mysterious this morning, sir," interposed Aunt Elizabeth.

"How can I help it, ma'am, if people will thrust their mysteries upon me?" asked Mr. Tibletts impatiently. "I don't ask for their mysteries, do I? I don't want to be in their confidence, not I."

"You thought you would let us know," repeated Aunt Mary, coming back to the point from which Mr. Tibletts had started.

"Yes, ma'am; yes, Miss Mary; and so—in short—there was a BABY brought into this

precious world of ours not twenty-four hours ago."

"Poor little thing!" ejaculated Aunt Martha.

"You have something else to tell us, Mr. Tibletts," said Aunt Mary. Aunt Elizabeth said nothing, and walked to the window.

"Not twenty-four hours," repeated Mr. Tibletts. "Poor little wretch! and not a rag to put upon it, Miss Lawson, not a rag. I am wrong there, though. There is a little cambric cap, half-made."

The "three Graces" looked at one another with a curious expression of countenance.

"How very negligent," whispered Aunt Elizabeth, turning round.

"Of the baby? yes, Miss Lawson, very; oh, very improvident. It will come to no good; it's first step in life has been a blunder, evidently."

"Nonsense, sir!" said Aunt Elizabeth, angrily for her. "It was of the mother I was speaking."

"Very likely; but don't blame her, Miss Lawson, don't blame *her*, you don't know all yet. Blame the baby as much as you like; if it had only waited —— but it is a she-baby, and that accounts for its being so impatient, I suppose."

"If you mean that the poor little thing is a girl," Aunt Mary began—

"I do mean it, Miss Mary."

"Then why not say so, Mr. Tibletts? A she-baby, indeed! It will be a she-wolf next, I suppose."

"Very likely, Miss Mary," replied the apothecary, unmoved. "But baby or wolf it must be fed —"

"And clothed, too," said Aunt Martha, shivering. "My dear," continued she, telegraphing and whispering to Aunt Elizabeth, "there are those—hem, hem—little things of Sidney's, you know, that I brought with me when ——" Aunt Martha's eyes filled with tears as she spoke. "Poor Alice made them all, you know, with her dear fingers, but I think she wouldn't mind; and they won't — won't — won't be wanted again, dear."

"But perhaps the poor young lady at Mrs. Slokum's would think it such a great liberty to take," said Aunt Elizabeth, hesitatingly.

"Oh, *she* won't think it a liberty; you need not be afraid of that, Miss Lawson," said the apothecary.

"Are you sure, Mr. Tibletts?"

"Quite sure."

"Then we will look them out and air them, and send them directly; and if there is anything else,—would a little wine be of any use?" Aunt Mary asked.

"No use at all, Miss Mary, without you want the woman, Slokum, to get—elevated."

"Of course not, my dear, so soon, so very soon after," added Aunt Martha. "A little gruel, perhaps, a packet or two of Embden groats, if the poor thing has not provided."

"Provided! There was nothing provided; and as to Mrs. Slokum, you know what *she* is," growled the apothecary.

"Well, Mr. Tibletts, they shall be sent; or if we were one of us to call ourselves, would the little young mother be offended?"

"I can answer for it that she won't be offended, Miss Martha," replied the visitor, with a troubled expression of countenance, "but I don't know that it signifies either; no, I would not call, I rather think you had better not; don't, if you please, Miss Lawson; and as to the—the little things you were speaking about, they won't be wanted, now I think of it."

"What do you mean, Mr. Tibletts?" demanded the "three Graces," almost in the same breath. "You tell us that the poor young creature hadn't provided anything for her dear baby; it is a living child, isn't it?"

"Oh, no doubt it is a living child, and likely to live, as far as that goes," said the apothecary, whose words dropped from him almost uncon-

sciously, and whose thoughts seemed to be wandering a long way off. "Yes, it is a living child, and a noisy one. You should hear it cry."

"Poor baby!" sighed Aunt Martha. "But why will not the ——"

"Baby linen?" suggested the apothecary.

"Why will it not be wanted, sir?"

"Because I expect there is plenty of it in the workhouse! Miss Martha."

"The workhouse! the workhouse, Mr. Tibletts!"

"Yes; that's what Mrs. Slokum says. You know Mrs. Slokum; 'tis just her way—unfeeling, of course, but practical."

"Dear me, Mr. Tibletts, do explain yourself, if you can," cried Aunt Elizabeth. "You tell us that Captain Warren has gone away; you don't mean, really, that he has deserted his pretty, dear little wife, and left her in destitution; and in such circumstances too?"

"Deserted! no, I didn't say that, Miss Lawson. But gone he is. Goodness! how could he help it? Tell me that, my good lady. Orders must be obeyed, I suppose."

"Well, Mr. Tibletts?"

"Well, ma'am; well, Miss Lawson, all I have got to say is, that Captain Warren called on me before he left Greenhurst, and showed me a letter

ordering him to join his regiment at twenty-four hours' notice. 'And now what am I to do, Mr. Tibletts?' said he. By the way, what occasion had he to be asking my advice, and making me responsible? I did not want to be meddling and making in his business, did I?"

"Probably Captain Warren had discovered you to be ——"

"Soft, Miss Mary; yes, that was it, no doubt; soft, ma'am."

"I did not say soft, Mr. Tibletts; I should have said, judicious and kind-hearted."

"Should you really, though; well, there's a feather in my cap I did not expect, at all events; but, for all that, I hold to soft."

"Please to go on with your story, Mr. Tibletts; remember the baby, if you please," interposed Aunt Martha.

"The baby! I am not likely to forget the baby," responded the apothecary, with a groan. "Well, my story, as you call it, Miss Martha, is a short one, and that's a comfort. 'What am I to do?' said he 'Go,' said I, 'duty calls, and duty is duty.' 'But there's poor Flo,' said he. 'Flo! what's Flo, Captain?' said I. 'Flo is my poor little wife,' said he, very grandly; 'Flo, for Florence—Florence Warren.'

"'Oh,' said I, 'I beg your pardon, I am sure,

but I thought you meant another sort of—something else, in short. I suppose,' I went on, 'that Mrs. Warren can't go with you?'

"'No,' said he, shortly; 'a thing impossible, Mr. Tibletts. Only consider!'

"I didn't know what there was to consider; but, like a simpleton, I said, 'Oh no, of course, Mrs. Warren cannot go with you.'

"'No, she cannot go with me,' said he, gloomily, 'and what to do! I want your advice, Tibletts,' said he again.

"'Suppose she were to go to her own home and friends while you are away,' said I.

"'She has no other home than at Greenhurst,' said the captain, 'and no friends. I married her, poor dear, an orphan, and homeless; that's why we became man and wife.'

"'*Your* home and friends, then, Captain,' that's what I said next, Miss Lawson.

"'I have no home either,' said he, with a melancholy smile; 'and no friends in England.'

"'What is to prevent Mrs. Warren from remaining at Greenhurst, then?' That was what I wanted to know next.

"'I think that must be,' said the Captain, 'but I am very poor, Mr. Tibletts.'

"'Oh, ho!' thought I; 'what next, I wonder.'

"'Look,' said the Captain, and he pulled out

his purse and emptied it into his hand, and then he counted it. There were just fifteen guineas in it, Miss Martha. 'I must have five of these,' said he, 'to take me to London. There are five for Florence, till I send her some more; and five for you, Tibletts.'

"'What for?' said I—just so.

"'In case she should want your advice, doctor; perhaps she may.'

"'I don't want to be paid beforehand, Captain,' said I.

"'Well,' said he 'it shall be as you please; only you will promise to give her your best attention.'

"'I never give my worst to anybody;' that's what I said next, Miss Lawson.

"'I shall see my agents in London,' said the Captain, 'and make arrangements ——'"

"Never mind about all that, Mr. Tibletts," broke in Aunt Mary, "come to the baby, poor little thing! and what you and Mrs. Slokum mean by the workhouse."

"Well, Miss Mary;—the long and short of it is, then, that nothing more has been heard of Captain Warren from that day to this, that I can find—that all the money is so near gone, that there is not enough to provide for the funeral, and that Mrs. Slokum—"

"The funeral!" (all "three Graces" at once.) "You told us that the baby was living, Mr. Tibletts."

"But I did not say that the poor mother was," said the apothecary, wiping his eyes.

"And you have been trifling with us in this way, Mr. Tibletts, all this time," cried Aunt Elizabeth.

"I left the baby quietly asleep, Miss Lawson; and it will not be taken to the workhouse till this afternoon."

"No, indeed; it shall never go there. But, oh! Mr. Tibletts, I could not have thought it of you. How could you let the poor dear little mother DIE? I shall never be able to forgive you, Mr. Tibletts." And Aunt Martha burst into tears.

* * * * *

And now other mists rise, and other shadows pass before me. I see, in memory, a frail, puny infant; I hear again its faint and feeble cries. I know that it is motherless; but loving hearts yearn over it, gentle hands tend it, and kind musical voices sing sweet lullabies over its cradle. They call it FLORENCE.

I hear mysterious conferences which I do not entirely understand, but from which I gather—child as I am—that little baby Florence is fatherless as well as motherless. I sometimes

catch the words, "cruelty," "treachery," "deception," "heartlessness," and wonder who has been cruel, treacherous, and so forth.

I often see Mr. Tibletts among these shadows. I gather that he takes long and fruitless journeys, of which, on his return, he gives account to his confidential friends; and I hear Aunt Elizabeth whisper to Aunt Martha, "Perhaps it is all for the best, my dear. We could not part with her now, without feeling very sad and desolate, could we?"

And I hear Aunt Mary add,—"We have enough for Sidney and Florence both, if nothing should ever turn up."

Then their counsellor, the apothecary interposes, "Oh, nothing will ever turn up, Miss Mary. I have looked up all the proofs and evidences, and there's nothing in them, nothing at all."

Then Aunt Martha kisses the sleeping infant, and presses it closer to her heart.

CHAPTER III.

A SHADOW IN THE HOUSE.

I WAS twelve years old, and I had another teacher. There was a poor curate in the village

who was glad to fill up his time and eke out his resources by giving daily lessons to three or four boys, for a consideration. I was one of them.

One of the other boys was Fenwick Ross. He was two or three years younger than I; but we were very fond of one another. I know that I loved him; I had chanced to save him from being drowned in our river, when we were boating one day, and the boat was upset. Perhaps that was why I liked him; but he was a noble little fellow, as well.

Fenwick's father was a rich man and a magistrate. He was grateful to me for having saved Fenwick's life, and he gave me a gold watch; but I did not much admire *him*, he was so condescending, which, I thought, proved him to be proud: perhaps I was wrong, and it was only a boyish fancy.

But though I did not like Mr. Ross very much, I often went to Ross Place: Fenwick was determined that I should. But not so often as he came to Virginia Cottage. I call my aunt's house by this name, after Mr. Tibletts, you see.

He was very glad—I mean Fenwick was very glad, he said, to get loose from the restraints of home for a few hours. He could do what he pleased when he was with my aunts. His parents did not object to his visiting us; so, in a short

time, he felt himself at home in Virginia Cottage. Our little Florence was, at this time, about four years old. She had pretty blue eyes, and flaxen hair as fine as silk, which hung in natural curls over her forehead. She had been taught to call me "brother"; and I—though I knew better—called her my little sister—sister Florence. She was always pleased to see Fenwick.

I shall have more to tell about Fenwick by-and-by: but now I turn to other matters.

One day, on going home from school, I was told that a visitor was with Aunt Elizabeth. He had just arrived. Presently, Aunt Martha and Aunt Mary went into the drawing-room. Then I also was called in.

"You do not know me, Sidney?"

"No sir."

"No; of course not: nor I you; I am glad to see you, however: and I want to make your acquaintance."

The speaker was a gentleman, scrupulously well-dressed in a suit of dark-brown cloth, gaiters included, and with large silver buckles on his shoes. He was over forty years of age—rising fifty perhaps; and his dark hair was sprinkled with white. His complexion was dark, so were his eyes; and there was nothing positively disagreeable in his countenance. Indeed, he was rather handsome than

otherwise; and yet, I am afraid, if the truth must be told, I did not admire the stranger, and, glad as he might be to see me, I did not reciprocate his desire for a more intimate acquaintance.

Besides, he had a harsh, stern voice; and there was nothing hearty in his manner of shaking hands with me, which I should have said he did when I first entered the room.

More than all, I saw that Aunt Elizabeth looked flushed and discomposed, and that Aunt Martha was in tears, and that little Florence, who was also present, clung to Aunt Mary and looked frightened.

"I may as well go on with what I was saying," said the stranger, turning to my aunts, after he had just spoken to me:—"and then we can dismiss the subject:—I did not approve of my brother's marriage, any more than I approved of his going into the church."

"You surely need not remind us of that, sir," said Aunt Martha; "we have heard too much already of these wretched family quarrels."

"It is necessary, madam, to remind you of it, for self-justification if for nothing else."

"But we do not ask you to justify yourself, sir; we bring no accusation against you, we never have done this;" said Aunt Mary.

"Not in your thoughts, young lady? Not

in the thoughts of either of you, my good ladies?"

"I do not consider, sir," replied Aunt Elizabeth, "that we are bound to answer that question. And I think, with my sisters, that this discussion is not necessary. Or, if you deem it necessary to repeat to us what we so well know already, there is little occasion for our nephew to hear what must be painful to him."

"I beg you to believe it to be very necessary, Miss Lawson," said the stranger: "for of course Sidney Bell has imbibed your own family prejudices against me."

"Indeed you are much mistaken, sir: Sidney has never heard us utter a word on the subject. He never knew that there were family unpleasantnesses. We have never spoken to him of you."

"Indeed!"

"At a proper time, sir; or at what we might decide would be a proper time," continued Aunt Elizabeth, "we should of course have told him so much of the history of his poor father as our own limited knowledge of it would permit; but, as you may suppose, the subject was not a happy one to dwell upon, and we have hitherto postponed it. Why should his young years have been saddened by the knowledge of the trials which probably shortened the lives as well as destroyed the

happiness, in part at least, of his departed parents?"

Aunt Elizabeth said this with such firmness and dignity that, for a moment, the stranger, whoever he might be, was silent and thoughtful. When he spoke again, there was more mildness in his tone and manner.

"There is something in what you say, Miss Lawson; and there is so much obvious sincerity in your statement, that I am convinced of its truthfulness. It is so far well, therefore; and the boy, our nephew, or if you prefer that I should say so, *your* nephew, has nothing to unlearn, in this particular. But perhaps the time is come for him to be told what he may hereafter have occasion to know. Have I your permission to explain, Miss Lawson? or would you prefer being the exponent of what you justly have called those wretched family quarrels?"

Aunt Elizabeth hesitated for a moment. "Since it must be so," she at length said, "though I cannot see the immediate necessity for it, but since it must be so, I candidly confess that I would rather be the exponent, to use your own term, sir."

"Let it be so, then," said the stranger.

Aunt Elizabeth beckoned me to her side; and while I stood marvelling at the strange, incom-

prehensible scene before me, she held my hand lightly in her own, and began—

"There were four sisters, Sidney, living together where now there are only three. They loved each other, I know; they were happy together, I believe. They were young, at least, two of them were, but they were orphans. They had not a large, but a sufficient income for all their wants, and for many luxuries. You follow me, Sidney?"

"Yes, aunt; I think I understand," said I.

"It is now several years ago, that these four sisters left their quiet home for a time, and passed some months at a distant fashionable watering place."

"Why not say Bath, Miss Lawson?" interposed the stranger. "That was the place, you know."

"Passed several months at Bath," Aunt Elizabeth went on, yielding to the correction. "The reason of their taking this step was that the younger sister had shown some symptoms of consumption, of which disease their mother had died; and their medical adviser strongly urged the eldest sister to try change of air and the use of mineral waters to restore bloom to her poor sister's cheek, and strength to her weak frame.

"The plan succeeded, or seemed to succeed. The dear invalid's health rallied and returned; but

to prevent the revival of any of the symptoms which had given such alarm, the sisters determined to remain in Bath for an indefinite time."

"Now I come to another part of the history; you follow me still, Sidney?"

It was a needless question; I did follow, nay, my thoughts went before her words.

"One day, in their walks around Bath, and on the neighbouring hills, the sisters met a young gentleman, who looked so pale, and had so evidently exhausted his strength in climbing a very steep part of the hill, that they thought it only common politeness——"

"Common humanity would be the better term, my dear," said Aunt Martha, gently interposing.

"Only common humanity," Aunt Elizabeth went on, adopting her sister's phrase, "Only common humanity to speak a sympathising word: and also to caution him against such excessive exertion, since he seemed to be weak, if not an invalid. The eldest of the sisters thought that she, at least, might do this without impropriety or forwardness." Aunt Elizabeth looked from me to the stranger, for a moment, as she said this, and then she added, "Her age, she believed, whether rightly or wrongly, gave her this privilege."

The stranger nodded, but he did not speak, and Aunt Elizabeth resumed her narrative.

"The young man thanked the—the possibly obtrusive speaker for her caution, and after resting himself for a while on the grass, passed on. But this was the beginning of acquaintance. At first, it extended only to silent recognition when the sisters and the young man met; but soon it reached to friendly words."

"After a time it was evident that, on the part of the young gentleman——"

"Only on his part, Miss Lawson? Pardon me, but I think this should be plainly stated."

"On the part of the young gentleman," repeated Aunt Elizabeth, with firmness and emphasis, "and on his only, these meetings were more than casual. It was so far from their wish that they should take place at all, that the sisters even discontinued their favorite walks, in order that the chance acquaintance might be dropped.

"But it had no such effect, Sidney, though it might have had, but for another circumstance. The sisters had a few friends in Bath whom they sometimes visited; and at the house of one of these, they very unexpectedly met and were introduced to—to the gentleman of whom I am speaking. His name was ——, one with which they afterwards became familiar, and his intended profession was one for which they had a very high respect.

"The sisters were told, however, that the gentleman had strangely and grievously offended his friends by determining on this profession; and that he was suffering both in mind and circumstances in consequence of their displeasure.

"This was the story the sisters heard, and it naturally led them to take an interest in one whom they supposed, whether truly or not, to have been persecuted for his religion—a greater interest perhaps, than prudence would have taught them if prudence had not been set aside for feeling.

"I need not tell you in many words, Sidney, how matters went on after this—how the acquaintance became more intimate—how it ripened by degrees into friendship—and how, at last, yet warmer sentiments were grafted upon friendship, and the youngest sister of all was engaged to be married to ——."

"I know who you mean, Aunt Elizabeth," I said in a whisper, "I know, of course, that you are speaking of my father and mother."

"I wished you to understand this," said she; "and what more I have to tell shall be told as of them. One day a stranger was announced, and was introduced to the four sisters—that is to say, to your mother, and to your three aunts—at their lodgings. He was comparatively a young man,

but some years older than your father was at that time."

"Take thirteen or fourteen years from my age and appearance, and that stranger is again present," said the gentleman.

"He introduced himself as the brother of our dear Alice's intended husband. He was certainly very angry, and we also thought him rude. He was evidently labouring under a misunderstanding that we had entrapped his 'silly, unreasoning brother,'—as he called your father—into the engagement; and he demanded, not only that it should be broken off, but that we should refuse to see him again while we remained in Bath. He also hinted that it would be better if we returned to our own home. Tell me, sir," said my aunt, appealing to our visitor, "if I do not state the circumstances correctly."

"I have no fault to find with your statements, thus far," he replied.

"It was natural that we should feel not only surprised, but irritated, by what we considered to be such unauthorised interference on the part of Mr. Ezekiel Bell; this was the brother's name."

"It is my name," said the Virginia Cottage visitor, quietly.

"And we asked him to explain his meaning. He did so. That is to say, he told us that he was

a London merchant; that he had succeeded his father in this business, which was an extensive one; that by the terms of his father's will, his brother Sidney (his only brother) was entirely dependent on him; that he himself had formed plans for his brother's advancement which had been frustrated by his obstinately persisting in a scheme of his own, that of entering college and preparing himself for the ministry; that this had led to a violent quarrel; that he had withheld supplies from his brother, who was consequently in debt; and that if Sidney should follow out his engagement with Alice, those debts would hang like a mill-stone round his neck. I think that was the expression."

"You are right, Miss Lawson; that *was* the expression;" said Mr. Ezekiel Bell—my uncle, as I now knew the stranger to be.

"— And that he would thenceforth disown him as a brother. The gentleman—this gentleman, you understand, Sidney—gave us no reason for this harsh conclusion."

"And I give no reason for it now, Miss Lawson," again interposed my newly found uncle, rather impatiently. "It might have been founded on a mistake; indeed, in some respects, it was, and that is partly why I am here to-day; but I am not disposed to explain what I then thought strong and cogent reasons for my decision."

"We do not wish to know those reasons, sir," continued Aunt Elizabeth, with dignity. "It is sufficiently painful to have to recall all these unpleasant circumstances, without adding to the discussion."

"There is not much more to tell, I think, my dear," suggested Aunt Martha.

"No, not much, my dear sister. If we had had our will and wish, Sidney," she went on, still addressing me, "I mean, if your three aunts now present had had to decide, the marriage would not have taken place. Not that we acknowledged the elder brother's right to dictate to us as he did; but because we had a strong aversion to disagreements, and also because we would not have had our dear Alice marry into a family in which, apart from her husband, she would be considered an alien.

"But it was not for us to decide and control; and Alice—your mother, Sidney,—generously, nobly, refused to be set against—against her future husband; I am not sure that the unwarrantable interference, as she called it, of this gentleman, did not hasten the event which he intended to set aside. But, whether or not this were the case, they were married,—Sidney Bell and Alice Lawson."

"The husband being deeply in debt, which he

had no means of discharging; and without any certainty of future employment. Do not forget that, Miss Lawson." It was my uncle Ezekiel who said this.

"It is not likely that I should forget it, sir," she said. "And yet, in one sense, this is incorrect. Your brother thought and believed that he knew of future employment. He had been promised a living then shortly becoming vacant."

"I know he had been," said Mr. Bell.

"But he was disappointed, Sidney"—once more turning to and addressing me impressively, and, for the moment, seeming to forget that any others were by,—"never stoop to concealment; never be guilty of equivocation; you never,—no one can ever calculate the consequences of one disingenuous word, to say nothing of the certain loss of self-respect which concealment involves. Your father was an honorable and truthful man, and there can be no honour where there is no truth; but, for once, he permitted himself to be tempted, I will not say, to deceit, but to a certain degree, at least, of misrepresentation. He had confessed to Alice that he was in debt; but he spoke lightly of the amount, and confidently of his power and means of extrication, apart from any expectation from his brother. He spoke so lightly of this, that he taught Alice and Alice's sisters to

think lightly of it also; and without any further explanations, the marriage took place.

"The next day, your father was arrested for debt; and, as we thought then, through the machinations of his brother."

"I must once more beg you to understand, as I earnestly and solemnly protest, that it was not so;" said my uncle.

"We are convinced now that it was not so," Aunt Elizabeth resumed; "but when applied to for help, that brother refused to render any assistance."

"As I had forewarned Sidney; as I had forewarned you on behalf of your sister," added my uncle: "you cannot say that I deceived, or equivocated, or concealed."

"You did neither, sir; if you were unkind, you were, at any rate, so far honest; you had said that you would disown your brother if he married against your wishes; and you did disown him. And now, Sidney," continued Aunt Elizabeth; "my narrative draws to a close. Your father was arrested; and the debt for which he was arrested was paid; but other creditors began to harass him. They understood that he had married a rich wife, though this was a mistake, and that a golden harvest was ready for their reaping. Public proceedings were taken against him; and it came out

then that the debts were not only large in amount, but had been, many of them, foolishly contracted. Public disgrace followed, before means could be taken for averting it. Eventually the debts were all paid by the entire sacrifice of our Alice's small fortune, aided—it is necessary, now that I am telling the story, to say this—aided by her sisters'. Then we hoped that all would be well.

"But the public exposure of your poor father's affairs had irretrievably injured him. The patron on whose promise he relied for church preferment, and on the strength of which he had married, withdrew from his engagements; and the unexpected blow, falling upon an already wounded spirit, crushed it; and not even the uncomplaining love of your mother, Sidney, could enable him to sustain his heavy burden of self-reproach.

"Eventually he obtained the small country living, where you were born; and you know the rest."

Aunt Elizabeth drew me nearer to her as she ceased speaking, and in another moment my weeping face was hidden—laid on her arm.

"I should not, of my own free will—nor would my sisters, of theirs—have given you this history yet," she said, after some moment's silence. "Some years hence would have been time enough for you to know what must in some measure distress you.

But this gentleman, whom you now understand to be your near relation, as near in relationship to you as we are, has thought it requisite for you to know all."

"I cannot tell why, I am sure," said Aunt Mary, with some spirit. "He has never before troubled himself about Sidney; and why he should do it now, he best knows himself."

"Still, as Mr. Bell has professed himself desirous of knowing his nephew, and has requested that these painful matters should be put straight before him, it was not for us to object, my dear," said Aunt Elizabeth, mildly. "We surely have no cause, and can have no wish, for concealment; and now I have only to appeal to the gentleman, whether I have in any way misstated facts, as far as we ourselves are acquainted with them."

"I am happy to say, Miss Lawson, that you have been fair and candid," said my uncle. "Some one or two trifling matters might have been added, perhaps, but they are of no material importance; and I am perfectly willing that our nephew's knowledge of these antecedents should now rest where it is. But there is one explanation which, perhaps, you will not object to give."

"Any explanation I can give is at your service, sir."

"May I ask, then, is it positively a fact, that

Sidney—I mean the boy here—has never heard of me?"

"Never from myself or my sisters, Mr. Bell."

"May I ask why he has not?"

"It is surely unnecessary to ask such a question; but, as you have asked it, it shall be answered. You yourself, sir, had furnished the reason; you had broken off all brotherly friendship—had declined correspondence—had refused assistance; and even when apprised of your poor brother's sudden and solemn death, you did not reply to the communication. Your brother was laid in his grave by the side of his long-suffering wife, and you were not there to bury with him all past resentments, and to speak a kindly sympathising word to the poor orphan. Your brother left debts undischarged, for he had never learnt to avoid this evil, or rather, I should say, the evil had, of late, been unavoidable; the debts were not large, it is true, and they were honestly paid, but not by the brother who ——. I will not speak of this, however. I would not have referred to it except to put it to you, Mr. Bell, to tell us what part of that brother's conduct would have borne to be spoken of with kindness and affection to the orphan nephew?"

"Of whose very existence you have been utterly oblivious," added Aunt Martha, "or, at least,

respecting whose welfare you have shown yourself entirely indifferent."

"These are heavy charges, ladies," said my uncle; "and I am bound to admit that they are partly just. I must explain, however, that at the time of my brother's death I was out of England, and had been some months. The letter which advised me of his demise, if there were such a letter——"

"If! Excuse me, Mr. Bell; there must be, there can be, no question about it. I wrote that letter myself, sir," interposed Aunt Martha.

"Nay, I meant no offence," rejoined Mr. Ezekiel Bell; "I should have said, *since* such a letter was sent. That letter never reached me. I accidentally heard of my brother's death after my return to England, and more than a year after the event took place; and I naturally concluded that the neglect to inform me of it was an intentional slight, which I resented accordingly. I am exceedingly glad to learn now, for the first time, that no such slight was put upon me. What I might have done had the intelligence reached me in due course, it is——I am not prepared to say. Possibly, however, you might not, in that case, have had to reproach me, with apparent justice, for some part of my subsequent conduct.

"But that," added he, "is nothing to the

point at present; and as our nephew—for I suppose I may recognise the mutual relationship—as our nephew is now possessed of so much of the past as is desirable for a right understanding all round, and as we have thus been introduced to each other, may I ask the favour of a few minutes further conversation apart from him?"

* * * *

Mr. Ezekiel Bell remained at Virginia Cottage that night, and departed early on the following morning, but he left his shadow behind him.

"And you want my advice, Miss Lawson?"

"If you will be so kind as to give it, Mr. Tibletts."

"In the first place, do you like Mr. Ezekiel Bell? Do you, Miss Martha? Do you, Miss Mary?"

"I don't see that that has much to do with the question," said Aunt Elizabeth.

"Don't you?"

"You see, our prejudices have been rather strong; perhaps they may be now, but these ought not to stand in the way."

Mr. Tibletts nodded. "I see; well, do you like him, young fellow?" This to me.

"No, Mr. Tibletts; I don't like him at all."

"I say, young turkey cock, what do you mean?" demanded the apothecary, favouring me

with a broad stare. "You know that we are talking of your uncle, eh?"

"I don't care if he is my uncle," shouted I, valorously; "you asked me if I liked him, Mr. Tibletts, and I tell you I don't like him, and I won't like him."

"Forcible, that!" said Mr. Tibletts, coolly. "And now we have broken the shell, let us get at the kernel. Is this terrible gentleman, whom Sid. doesn't like and won't like, a man of his word, do you think, Miss Lawson?"

"He showed himself so in regard to his poor brother."

"In disregard of him, you mean. True. And therefore you think his word in others matters may be trusted. All right so far, and you say he offers to be at the charge of Sidney's education?"

"Yes."

"Secondly, to take him into his counting-house in the city, wherever it is."

"Yes, Mr. Tibletts."

"Thirdly and lastly—quite a sermon you see—lastly, to leave the bulk of his property to him, provided there's no fresh quarrel. I presume that is to be understood."

"I presume so, Mr. Tibletts; though it was not mentioned," said Aunt Elizabeth.

"And provided also that he has anything to leave, eh?"

"That was not mentioned either."

"No, of course not. But it may as well be taken into account, for it is of no use to build upon such hopes. These great city men are as rich as Dives one day, and as poor as Lazarus the next; poorer perhaps, for I don't suppose Lazarus was in debt. Who would have trusted him, I wonder?—the poor beggar!"

"Well, that does not signify, Mr. Tibletts," said Aunt Elizabeth. "The question is, whether we shall accede to Mr. Bell's proposals."

"I would if I were you, Miss Lawson; yes, I think I would, I am pretty sure of it."

"Really?" said Aunt Mary. "Do you really mean it?" and I fancied she looked surprised and disappointed as well.

"Yes really, Miss Mary; I dont see why you should not. I know what you will say; that you never asked for Mr. Bell's help, and that you can do without it. But then, put it in another light. Here's Sidney; he is a boy now, but you don't expect him to be a boy much longer. Suppose four or five years passed away, and then, if not before, he will have to be doing something for himself; then the question will be what to do with him. You must put him into the world, and you don't

know anybody in the world; then begins your trouble, and——"

"I think we know what you mean, Mr. Tibletts," said Aunt Elizabeth, who, as I now think, did not wish me to be reminded of the obligations I was already under to herself and her sisters, nor of the anxiety which I might cause them in future. "We will pass by all that," she added, "because these reasons are merely selfish."

"Well, then, to come to reasons which are not selfish. Here is Mr. Bell; no doubt he has acted cruelly, to a certain extent, unjustly, unbrotherly, un-unclely, if you will allow such an expression. But he repents, you see. He wishes to make reparation. He has too much delicacy and good sense to make a money business of it, and hand over a lot of bank notes——"

"If he had done so——" interposed Aunt Martha, reddening.

"You would not have taken them; I know that, and he knows it too; but he does better than that; he says, 'I am sorry; I repent; I must make reparation; and I must do it in the way which will be most acceptable. I cannot call back the past, so I must do it in time to come. Here is my nephew, a fine young fellow.'" Mr. Tibletts patted my shoulder as he said this, and I

drew sulkily away, for I did not like the course the discussion was taking. "'A fine young fellow,'" continued the apothecary, still speaking for Uncle Ezekiel, "'and I'll make a man of him. I owe him something for his father's sake. I cannot undo the wrong I did to my poor brother; but I'll make it up in generosity (no, not generosity, that's not the right word, either), in justice to my poor brother's son!' Now, Miss Lawson, Miss Martha, Miss Mary, what can you possibly object to this? Would you stand in the way of this poor man's doing justice? Would you say to him, 'You are such a big sinner that there's no place of repentance for you?' Would you crush him with contempt? Would you, now? would you? would you?"

"Do you think we should, Mr. Tibletts?" asked Aunt Martha.

"Of course not. I know you wouldn't. You would make the poor man happy by telling him you had forgiven him, and you would lend him a helping hand back into the right road. That's what you would do, and it is what you will do," said Mr. Tibletts.

"But there is Sidney to be considered," rejoined Aunt Elizabeth.

"That is what I was coming to, Miss Lawson. Yes, there is Sidney to be considered; and there

is no objection to his being put in the way of being a rich man, I suppose?"

"You forget, Mr. Tibletts, what you said just now, about 'those great city men,'" remarked Aunt Mary, with a smile.

"Ah, that comes of particularising; but that was a—a figure of speech. There are ups and downs, of course, and chances for and against, so there are in everything, Miss Mary."

"Very true," said Aunt Elizabeth; "and that may be passed over. What I meant by saying that Sidney is to be considered was, that his own inclinations must be consulted."

"To a certain extent, Miss Lawson; but Sidney Bell is under tutors and governors now, you see, and he must trust to their judgment. He will, of course. Besides—bless the young fellow—he is not going to be hung, you know, nor transported, nor anything of the sort. He'll be *your* nephew just as much as ever; and say that, by and by, when his wisdom teeth are cut, he sees reason to quarrel with your plans, he will be none the worse for having tried them. There will be Virginia Cottage for him to fall back upon at last."

"You *will* call our house by that ridiculous name, then, Mr. Tibletts?"

"I can't help it, Miss Mary; it is a habit I have got. Besides, it is Virginia Cottage. Why

don't you give it another name, ladies, if you don't like that?"

"Oh, the name is nothing. Call it what you like, Mr. Tibletts; that is not the question just now," said Aunt Elizabeth quickly, who had her reasons perhaps for disliking that subject. "We were talking about Sidney."

"Yes, ma'am; yes, Miss Lawson; well, you leave Sidney to me, and I'll convince *him*."

I went home with Mr. Tibletts that evening, and if he did not convince me, he persuaded me to agree with my uncle's proposals. I need not rehearse his arguments. What affected me most was his appealing to my feelings when he represented, truly, how much my aunts had sacrificed in former days for my parents; and that it was due from me not to put away the chances which might arise out of this renewed intercourse with my uncle of making, at some future day, some return to them for their kindness.

So it was agreed that, at any rate, Mr. Ezekiel Bell's overtures should not be rejected, while they were left open for any modifications which circumstances might render desirable.

But from this time there was a shadow in the house. My uncle's shadow rose before me continually, with the aspect of an ogre, darkening every bright scene, and chilling every warm thought

and emotion. If my kind protectresses had known or could have guessed what I suffered then, they would have consigned Mr. Ezekiel Bell to the oblivion from which he had so suddenly broke in upon us. But no, they could not have done this; the shadow would not have been banished, though the substance had been dismissed for evermore.

From this time, mists of the past disappeared, or were disregarded, while a dark mist hung over the future. I no longer looked back with melancholy; I looked forward with dread. And oh! what shadows of evil appeared in, and were magnified by, that mist!

CHAPTER IV.

MY DIARY.

When I was eighteen years of age I began to write a diary. I am not prepared to condemn the practice, though I did not long continue it. I believe it was of use to me while it lasted. It is of use to me now, since it furnishes me with materials for my history. Here are a few extracts from it.

First extract.—"This is my birthday; so I am told. All I can say about it is that, if I entered into the world on such a dismal day as

this is, I do not wonder that I am haunted with shadows. I must have come in with a mist, and the mist has stuck to me ever since. This is folly, though; for now I remember it was just such a day as this, only more gloomy, on which Florence Warren was born, and a more light-hearted, clear-headed, happy and darling little puss never existed. I cannot think what I should have done without her all these years. But I must learn to do without her now, for all that. Heigh-ho!

"'Heigh-ho!' What does that mean? I suppose it means that I don't look forward with much pleasure to going to London next week. Very well, I don't, and that is the truth. Well, Aunt Elizabeth tells me that I can do as I please, even now; but then—and then—and then. No, I won't have Mr. Tibletts telling me that I am a coward. I do not think I am; I hope not.

"Next week. I am positively going away from home again next week, and not to school; that's done with. However, this is to be my home still, and there is someting in that. I dare say Uncle Ezekiel's office, or counting-house, whichever he calls it, will be as endurable, at any rate, as the schoolroom at M——; and it will be hard if Uncle Ezekiel himself does not turn out to be as amiable as our old doctor.

"I hope and believe I have got rid of some of

my old prejudices—my first prejudices, I mean—against Mr. Ezekiel Bell. It is not my aunt's fault if I have not, for they have never breathed a syllable against him. Nor would it be Mr. Tiblett's fault, either, for he always stands up for Uncle Ezekiel, though I don't know why he should, I am sure. Only little Flo. abuses him; she says that he frightened her so that one time when he visited Virginia Cottage, that she has never liked him since. But this is only a child's fancy, and ought not to weigh with me.

"With me! How grand I am, though; as if I had put away childish things and thoughts and feelings, and were a man. This is because I have begun to keep a dairy, I suppose.

"By the way, Florence saw this book I am now writing in on my desk to-day, and asked me what it was for. I told her, and she thought I said it was for a *dairy*.

"'A dairy, Sid.!' said she, opening her eyes wide; 'but your uncle does not keep cows, does he?'

"But if I go on like this, I shall never get through my diary. So, to go back again to the point I started from, in another week I shall be in London—a clerk—my uncle's. I must say for this gentleman that he has behaved well to me thus far. He found out a good school for me,

when my old teacher, the poor curate, obtained another and better living, and left Greenhurst; he has been at all the expense of my education for five years past, and has made me a handsome allowance as well. Besides this, every half he paid a visit to M—— on purpose to see me, and never said good-bye without *tipping* me nobly. But for all this, I question whether he has much affection for me; if he has, he keeps it shut up pretty closely in his heart of hearts. It seems to me that what he has done, and is doing for me substantially, is from some principle of repairing the wrong done to my poor father. Well, so much the better if it is, it does not burden me so much with a weight of obligation. To turn to another subject, however.

"I can see that my kind, simple, generous, affectionate aunts don't half like the idea of my going to London. They have a great dread of the temptations to which I shall be exposed there. I fancy they would have preferred, if they could have had the choice, that time should have stood still with me, and that I could have always remained a child, under their own almost more than motherly care. But seeing that this could not be, and that I must, in the nature of things, go out into the world, they are not displeased that I shall be under my Uncle Ezekiel's eye and guidance. I

fancy that they have made, from time to time, diligent, though secret, inquiries respecting this gentleman, who burst upon us all so unexpectedly and unwelcomely six years ago, and that these inquiries have been satisfactory. Aunt Martha hinted as much to me, the other day.

"So to London I go. One condition has been insisted on by Aunt Elizabeth, who has been the prime negociator with Uncle Ezekiel, and always by letter—which is that I am to spend a month, at least, every year down here, in the country. My uncle pished and pshawed about this in his reply; but my aunt carried her point at last. I am glad of this. Dear Virginia Cottage! I shall never find such another home, with such warm, loving hearts."

* * * * *

SECOND EXTRACT (*ten days later*).—"I have been four days at my uncle's house in London, but this is the first opportunity of writing a line in my diary. And, indeed, I have not much to write. This is a mistake, though, for I should have a great deal to write if I were to put down everything that has passed since the last date in this book. Let me consider. First of all, there was the parting with all the good people at Greenhurst. If I were to put down all they said and did, I should fill up a good many pages. There were my aunts, for

instance, how many blessings they invoked; how many tears they shed when it came to the last hour; how many promises they made, which I am sure they will keep; how many promises they received, which I hope I shall keep; I know that I shall be an ungrateful fellow if I do not keep them.

"Then there was Florence—'sister' Florence—my darling baby playfellow years ago. How she threw her arms round my neck and cried, and said that I should not go away again, no, I should not, till she brought tears into my eyes too. Then, when she knew that resistance was useless, how she put her pouting, ruby lips to mine, and pretended all the while to believe that I cared nothing for her in my heart, and that I should soon forget 'poor little Flo.' Shall I?

"Then came Mr. Tibletts to say good-bye, and to present me with a parting gift. It was nicely packed up in white paper, and I was not to open it till I reached London. I have not remembered it till this moment, and of course I have not opened the packet. I will do so now and write down what it is. I must say for Mr. Tibletts, that he is, and always has been, a very kind friend to me, as well as a wise counsellor to my aunts, who have more faith in him than in any body else with whom I am acquainted; and I should not wonder——

"FAUGH! 'As I do live by food,' there is

nothing but physic in the parcel; PHYSIC!! pills in boxes, pills in bottles, powders in packets, rhubarb in lumps, rhubarb in powder, and I don't know what beside; enough, one would imagine, to cure, or to kill, a whole infirmary of dyspeptic patients; and there are directions on packets, bottles, and boxes, to say when the contents are to be taken, and how, and on what occasions. There is a note, too, from Tibletts, but I have not had patience to read it. I am much obliged to Mr. Tibletts, or ought to be; but when I take his physic I'll let him know.

"My last parting was with Fenwick Ross, for he —kind fellow—would insist on driving me several miles on the road in his father's gig, to prevent my having to walk a mile or two to get to the coach. Fenwick was vexed at my going away from Greenhurst. We have been companions now more than eight years, and have never had a single misunderstanding, much less a quarrel. We were schoolfellows at Greenhurst. Then, when our old teacher went away, and my uncle proposed my going to M——, to complete my education, Fenwick persuaded his father to let him go too. And now that we have both left school 'for good,' as the saying is, and Fenwick is to remain at home for the present, it puts him out that I cannot stay at home too. Fenwick forgets the difference there is

between us in circumstances and station. His father is a rich man, and there is no immediate need for Fenwick to be put in the way of making money; whereas, although my aunts are not poor, I have learned enough from them to know their property is very moderate in amount, and that therefore it had always been their intention to give me some kind of business to do, which would have banished me from Greenhurst, although Uncle Ezekiel had never existed or taken me in hand. So I told Fenwick as we drove along, but he did not seem willing to understand it. However, we shall see one another at times, and we have agreed to correspond. I shall always be glad to get his letters, and I dare say he will mine.

"After this parting came the journey. It was a long one; and, according to custom, I began dreaming away with my eyes wide open, as the coach lumbered along the rough roads at the rate of five miles an hour. It is a bad habit, this dreamy habit of mine, I am told; but I cannot help it. It was born with me, I suppose. Perhaps I may shake it off now I have something real to do. At any rate, I shall not have so much time to indulge in it.

"I cannot remember what all my waking dreams were about; and it does not signify. I know, however, that all the mists and shadows of the

past rose up before me in very gloomy tints, and all the future seemed yet so much more gloomy and disheartening, that I was almost tempted to wish that I had never been born. My poor father's story, as much as I knew of it, came into my mind. I recalled his shadowy form, and my mother's; the little, old, homely church, and the poorly furnished parsonage-house, then the marble tablet on the church-wall, then the green mounds which covered——

"I drove this shadow away with a strong effort; then others came and floated about on the mists of memory. The dark, dull, foggy day, when I first heard the story of little baby Florence's poor mother, and when little Florence herself was introduced to Virginia Cottage, wrapped up in so many warm blankets, and shawls, and cloaks, that the wonder to me always has been that she was not smothered at her very first entrance into life. Then the shadow came before me of Florence, as I had seen her only a few hours before.

"I had got as far as this, and the pretty shadow was smiling on me, through tears, as I thought, when I was called back from the land of shadows by a conversation between the coachman and a passenger on the box just in front of me. We were going down a steep hill.

"'I had a pretty summerset at the bottom of

this hill ten years or more ago,' said the coachman.

"'How was that?' asked the passenger.

"'In this way,' replied Jehu; 'just about on this very spot the drag-chain broke, and the coach gave a jerk over the drag, and you can guess what follered.'

"'No, I don't know that I can,' said the passenger; 'but I suppose you pulled up.'

"'Pulled up! You never druv a coach, I reckon, sir.'

"'I cannot say that I ever did,' responded the gentleman.

"The coachman nodded. 'Easy to see that,' said he. 'Pulled up! No, sir, I didn't pull up, nor try to it. I just laid on to the tits; gave them the lash——'

"'Oh, I see; the horses you are talking about; you gave them the whip, eh?'

"'I gave them the whip, sir,' continued the coachman; 'and if ever they felt it, they did then.'

"'What for, coachman?' asked the passenger.

"'To save them, and my blessed neck as well, sir; that's why I did it. And you should have seen us rattling down this hill, sir, that's all.'

"'Well, I can only hope the drag-chain won't break to-day,' said the passenger, nervously.

"'No fear, sir.'

"'Because if that is the way you do it, I would rather not be your passenger on such an occasion, that's all.'

"The coachman laughed. 'That's the way I did it, however,' said he.

"'And got a summerset at the bottom of the hill, you said, I think,' returned the passenger, triumphantly.

"'Couldn't help that, sir; the coach was top-heavy with luggage, you see, and it swayed and rocked and rolled like—like a drunken man, when it got into full swing. But for all that, we should have got on safe enough if it had not been for a great stone in the road; that finished it; but the horses were all right. They were only blowed a bit and a little more, and stood and trembled like —like Christians.'

"'And you were all right, too, I suppose; at any rate, you saved your blessed neck, as you call it; but how did your passengers come off?' demanded the gentleman.

"'There was only one passenger, as it happened; and he—ah! it was rather a bad job that —his own fault, though.'

"'He was killed, I suppose.'

"'No, he wasn't that—killed, though he might have been, and only himself to thank for it—that and the rotten drag-chain.'

"'How only himself to thank for it?' demanded the gentleman.

"'Why just this way, sir. When I felt the coach give a lurch, and knew it was going, "Hold hard, sir!" said I; "for mercy's sake, sit still and hold on." And he wouldn't. Before the words were out of my mouth—I should tell you he was sitting beside me, just where you are now—well, before the words were out of my mouth, up he starts in a fright, gives a spring, and there he was.'

"'Where, coachman?'

"'Just on that bit of sward,' answered the coachman, pointing with his whip to the roadside, and at the same time stopping his horses and putting the reins in my fellow-passenger's hand, while he got down to take off the drag. 'I always take off my drag just here,' said he, when he had remounted the box, 'to keep me in mind of the poor captain.'

"'The captain?'

"'Yes, he was a captain, I believe; leastwise he was an officer in the milintary line.'

"'What was his name?' asked the passenger.

"'Never heard his name, from first to last,' replied the coachman.

"'He was not killed, you say?'

"'No, but he was smashed. Goodness! *I* never

saw such a sight. He oughtn't to have jumped, he oughtn't.'

"'Why not? Now, I should have thought it the wisest thing he could do.'

"'Don't you ever try it, sir,' said the coachman, solemnly.

"'What happened, then?' demanded the passenger.

"'Why this happened; he didn't clear the coach, and he couldn't. He wasn't half way to the ground before the coach was on him, sir—on him; and there he was under it, the whole weight on him. And when help came, and a mercy it came pretty soon, and the coach got lifted, there he was—*smashed*.'

"'And not killed, you say?'

"'Not killed, but a'most as bad. However, we lifted him, and got him into a cottage — it isn't here now, 'twas burnt down a year or two after. But it was there then, and we got him in, and I drove on and sent a doctor from the next town.'

"'Well, what were his hurts?'

"'I don't know how many broken ribs he had or hadn't, but his collar-bone was broke in two places; his arm was broke, so was his thigh; but that wasn't the worst.'

"'It wasn't, eh? What was the worst, then?'

"'He'd got a percussion of the brain; that was the worst, sir.'

"'Oh! a *con*cussion you mean, coachman.'

"'*Per*cussion, the doctor said; and I suppose he knowed,' replied the coachman: 'but per or con, it settled the poor man, anyhow, for a month; he never came to his senses, and never spoke a word for a whole month. I know *that*, for I called and inquired after him every day as I passed.'

"'But he did recover?'

"'Yes, after a manner, he did; he got well enough, I should say, to be taken post to London, by some friend of his, they said; and that was the last I heard of him.' Here the coachman's story ended.

"I don't know exactly why, but this story put me in mind of what I had heard about Florence's father—Captain Warren—and his never having written to his wife—never having been heard of, indeed—from the day he left Greenhurst to join his regiment. The date tallied pretty exactly; and supposing he were the coachman's military passenger, and, after being removed to London, supposing he died of the injuries he had received, this would account for the silence which had clouded his memory with suspicion. To be sure, there are difficulties in the way of this

theory, but it may be the right one. I'll write or speak to Mr. Tibletts or to Aunt Elizabeth about it some day."

* * * * *

THIRD EXTRACT (*several weeks later*).—"I have been in London nearly two months, and am well in harness, as my uncle tells me. That is to say, from nine o'clock in the morning to seven at night, barring meal-times, I am daily boxed up in a railed-in corner of a dark counting-house in the city, with a desk before me, and a window behind to let in the light—such light as can penetrate through a crust of venerable dirt gathered on every pane. I cleaned one of the panes the first day that I came; but as nothing was visible outside but a dead-wall, at the distance of about six feet from the window, I did not take the trouble to clean any more. As it is, I have light enough for my work.

"That work is copying letters. My uncle seems to have correspondents in almost all parts of the known world; and as he will have every letter he receives copied, as well as all his replies, I have enough to do from morning to night.

"It is dull work enough; but sometimes amusing.

"There are several clerks in the counting-house; dull fellows they seem, without exception.

They come and go without having a word to say except on business; it seems that if I should stay here as many months or years as I have been days, I should know nothing more of them than that they *are* my uncle's clerks. Perhaps I am mistaken, however, and one thing I have learned accidentally, namely, that they are mostly old stagers; that two or three of them have been in my uncle's employment for periods varying from ten to twenty years. I have also discovered, equally accidentally, that one old clerk who fell ill a year or two ago, and is unable to do anything, is supported by Uncle Bell in comparative comfort. This is something to know.

"My uncle is kind enough to me. He never finds fault, though he is sparing of his words. In fact, he is unaccountably reserved. I don't know what to make of him. By the way, probably he does not know what to make of me.

"I live in my uncle's house, which is a large one, though his domestic establishment is small. I cannot say that I like my aunt (for, though I did not know this before I came to London, Uncle Ezekiel is a married man, though he has no children, and never had any)—no, I don't like Aunt Bell. She is a peevish old woman, much older than my uncle; and there does not seem to be much love lost between them. They squabble

sometimes; but I ought not to speak of this, even to my diary. I only wish, however, that my London aunt were like those at dear Virginia Cottage.

"Apart from this, I am comfortable enough, and have nothing to complain of. They feed me well, and I have a well-furnished chamber. Uncle Ezekiel also seems disposed to be liberal towards me in money affairs.

"He is something of a Puritan, I think, in his principles—his religious principles, I mean. He is a Dissenter, and on Sundays regularly attends (I use his own expression) a large Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in Moorfields. Perhaps his being a Dissenter is the reason he was so angry with my poor father for going into the Church. And yet I cannot reconcile this with his conduct towards myself. He makes no objection to my going to church instead of to his meeting-house. He has no wish to force my conscience, he says, nor to judge for me in matters pertaining to religion. He only requires that I attend public worship, which is only reasonable and proper, of course."

* * * * *

FOURTH EXTRACT (*six months later*).—"I have just had a long conference with Uncle Ezekiel; no, not exactly a conference, for I spoke scarcely

a word, but I have listened to what he said, and I have heard—

"I am troubled. How I wish I were at Greenhurst, and could open my heart to one or all of my aunts there. But could I? Could I, when I shrink from writing down here, where no eye but my own need ever see it, what I have heard? No; I cannot, will not write it.

"But I may write this:—my uncle has vindicated and cleared himself in regard to much of his conduct towards my poor father. He has shown me documents, which I cannot dispute, which prove him to have been upright and honorable throughout that miserable affair. He never wronged my father. Stern he was—perhaps harsh—but not intentionally unjust, and I have no claim upon him by way of reparation. I cannot write more without casting a darker shadow on the memory of my poor father, and I will not do that. But I can understand now, better than I did when the words were spoken by my Aunt Elizabeth — how my father's— my dear suffering father's—spirits were crushed within him. 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity,' even though that infirmity be pain, disappointment, loss, poverty, derision; 'but a wounded spirit who can bear?'

"It was no narrow-minded prejudice on the

score of religious differences of opinion which separated my father from my uncle — I may say this without implying blame to either.

"My good, simple-minded aunts at Greenhurst knew but little of my poor father's previous history; neither did my mother. Perhaps she did before she died; but I am not sure. I have a faint remembrance of what I think must have been an exquisitely touching scene in her sick chamber, only a few days before she died; but when I try to grasp it, the shadow eludes me and is lost in the surrounding mist. It is better that it should be so, perhaps.

"Let me take home to my heart the lesson I have learned so painfully. I well remember how impressively Aunt Elizabeth warned me against disingenuousness and concealment, and how she referred to my poor father as having once 'permitted himself to be tempted.'

"Is it true that, when any one yields to temptation, it is by his own permission? I suppose it must be so; there is Scripture to back it—'Every man, when he is tempted, is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.' Let me remember this."

Here may end these extracts from "my diary." Misty and shadowy, they nevertheless are parts of my history.

CHAPTER V.

MR. TIBLETTS' PATIENT.

"I AM going in here, Sid., and you may as well come too."

It was at Greenhurst. I was then on one of my annual holidays—the second of them—and had been walking round the village with Mr. Tibletts. Of course I had forgiven him the trick he had played me in his parting present, two years before, and we were as good friends as ever. At this particular moment we were in front of the village workhouse, which was nothing but a large, low, thatched cottage, with a neat flower-garden in front, and bearing no resemblance whatever to a modern union house.

"What for, Mr. Tibletts?" I wanted to know.

"I have a patient to visit here," said he.

"But *I* need not see your patient. I'll wait outside for you."

"No, come in."

"You want another patient on your visiting list. Suppose I were to catch a fever, what

would my aunts say to you then, Mr. Tibletts?" I said.

"Nonsense; she is not a fever patient, Sid. There's no fever in Greenhurst; so come along, it will be a study for you."

Making no further objection, I followed the apothecary into the house. In an apartment on the groundfloor there were some half dozen old people, twice as many children, and three or four slatternly women—young and bold-faced—sitting round a board. It was their dinner hour, and a detestable stench of boiled, rancid pork and cabbage pervaded, not only the dining-room, but the whole house. I was not curious, however, to see paupers at feeding-time; and without taking or attracting much notice, we quickly passed through that room, and reached a flight of low, narrow, worm-eaten stairs which led to the floor above. It seemed that Mr. Tibletts was a privileged visitor, for though we met more than one person in our progress, we were permitted to go on unchallenged.

We passed through two or three dormitories before arriving at the apartment sought by the apothecary. At last he pushed open a creaking door, and we entered a small room, little better than a closet, containing one truckle-bed. The place was so indifferently lighted by a small

window with only six or eight small panes of dim, semi-translucent green glass, that I did not at first perceive that the bed was untenanted. After a moment or two, however, I became aware of this fact, and also that an old woman, bent almost double with age, or infirmity, or weakness, and wrapped in a coarse red cloak, who was seated, or rather crouched, on a chair by the window, was Mr. Tibletts' patient. There was a small table by her side, and a basin on it, containing, as I presently saw, a half-consumed mess of whitey-brown stuff, which I supposed was gruel.

The old creature moved impatiently, and muttered to herself when the door opened, but was partly pacified when my companion walked up to her and sat down on the edge of the bedstead —for there was not another seat in the room. As for myself, I had reason to believe afterwards that the patient was unconscious of my presence. Her eyes were bleared and dim, and her perceptions obtuse; and, added to this, I had accidentally at first taken my station behind her chair; a station which I afterwards intentionally kept during the interview.

"So, and how are you now, Mrs. Slokum?" said the apothecary, abruptly.

MRS. SLOKUM!

Mists and shadows again. The old shadow of

pretty Baby Florence on that dismal day; and of the cruel, heartless woman who, but for my aunts and Mr. Tibletts, would have consigned her to the workhouse! The old remembrance of Mr. Tibletts' expressed antipathy, and of my aunts' indignation!

Mrs. Slokum! I had a faint shadowy remembrance of the woman, and of the dread with which her name inspired me as a child, ever after that day, because I attached to her and it an idea of her having been in some way or other the cause of death to Florence's mother, and of possessing a strong, fiendish hatred to Florence herself; but I had not heard the name for years. A misty, shadowy remembrance crossed my mind that she had left Greenhurst years and years ago—not many months after the birth of Florence,—and that previous to her disappearance her conduct had been scandalously bad; that she had given way to dram-drinking, and, while in a state of abominable drunkenness, had been more than once hooted through the village. I felt that I must have known this, and, on one occasion, witnessed it, though the memory of the scene had been almost effaced. It came out again strong now, however; and I looked keenly, though cautiously, at the wretched old creature, who sat rocking to and fro in her chair, to trace, if I

could, any resemblance to the Mrs. Slokum of my young days; but I could not.

All these, and I know not how many more shadows, passed across my mind in the interval between Mr. Tibletts' question and the reply it elicited.

"What's the use of asking me how I am, doctor? I suppose you know, without my telling you," said Mrs. Slokum, in a fretful, quavering voice.

"Well, I can give a guess, at any rate," said my companion, coolly.

"And it would not do you any harm if you were to tell me, would it?"

"It would do me no harm; but perhaps it might not please you, Mrs. Slokum," said the apothecary.

"You are very particular in wanting to please me, I reckon," retorted the old woman.

"No, I can't say that I am," replied Mr. Tibletts, bluntly.

"No," continued the old creature, bitterly; "you leave all that for them as has got money."

"You are mistaken, old lady; say for those who have honesty, and you would be nearer right. But I don't want any words with you; I am come to set you up again for a little while, if I can; though what good would be done by that is more

than I can guess," muttered the apothecary between his teeth.

"Can't you speak out, doctor? I have got hard of hearing of late," said Mrs. Slokum, tremblingly. She had seen Mr. Tibletts' lips move, but had not heard his words.

"What do you wish me to say?"

"I want you to tell me how I am, and what's the matter with me."

Mr. Tibletts did not reply for a minute or two, but contented himself with feeling the old woman's pulse, or going through the form of feeling it, at any rate. At last he looked her full in the face.

"You have something on your mind," said he; "and what is the use of my trying to bring you round while that sticks to you?"

"It is a lie," faltered Mrs. Slokum; "what should there be on my mind? What do you know about it? Who has been telling lies about me? A poor old creature like me to have anything on her mind!" Mrs. Slokum uttered all this in short spasmodic jerks, and she attempted to laugh when she had done; but the laugh sounded like a low yell, and she trembled violently.

"Very well," said the apothecary, "let it be a lie, if you like. All I can say is, I can do nothing more for you; my medicines won't do you any

good. And I could tell you something else—shall I?"

I never before had seen, nor have I since, such a look of despair and affright as that old woman's countenance presented, as I cautiously glanced at it from the dark corner in which I was ensconced.

"Don't say it, doctor!" she shrieked; "I can't die—I wont, I wont. You are a good man, Mr. Tibletts, and you wont let me die yet, will you now? You only say it to terrify me. I am a ——"

"Be silent, woman," interposed the apothecary, sternly; "I only tell you what you know yourself. There is trouble on your soul, and you had better try and get rid of that, if you can."

The woman was silent, but she began again to rock herself in her chair; and Mr. Tibletts rose from his uneasy seat.

"Don't go, doctor; don't go yet," whined the patient feebly. "You are so hard upon me, you know, and so sharp; but you don't mean it. You always were good to the poor, Mr. Tibletts; and I'll—yes, I'll ——"

"You need not tell me what you will do, Mrs. Slokum; if you have anything to say—and you know best what it is—I will get the clergyman to come and see you."

"I wont see him; I wont see any parsons. I

told him so when he came buzzing about me yesterday, and I meant it too. I don't want any parsons, and I wont have them," she said, passionately.

"I will ask Miss Lawson to call; you remember Miss Lawson, I suppose?" said the apothecary.

"No, no, no, no; she'd be worse than a parson," again screamed the half-demented old creature.

"You will have to tell somebody about it, you know," continued Mr. Tibletts; "you would not like to carry it with you to the grave, whatever it is."

The old woman groaned.

"If you will not have Miss Lawson, shall I send for Florence Warren ——"

The shrill shriek which followed this name as soon as it was uttered, and which not only prevented the apothecary from completing the sentence he had begun, but caused him to start and change countenance, and which so resounded through the apartment, that I expected to see the other inmates of the house rushing in to ascertain its cause, was succeeded by low moaning sobs and groans from the miserable patient. No alarm seemed to have been taken, however; and Mr. Tibletts resumed his seat on the bedstead, and silently watched the convulsive throbs of the wretched woman. Presently the sobs subsided,

and she spoke, but in so low a tone that I had to bend forward, at a motion from the apothecary, to catch the import of her words.

"You can't say that I meant to do it. There's nobody can say it. I can stand at God's bar and say I didn't mean to do it. I gave her the sleeping stuff; yes, I don't mean to say that I didn't. Not your stuff, doctor; I said it was that, but it wasn't; it was some I had by me in another bottle. I don't deny that. I knew mine was stronger than yours; and I wanted her to sleep sound; but I did not think she would go off. There, now I have told you."

It was not a warm day, even in the sunshine, and the room was decidedly chilly; but when I glanced for a moment at Mr. Tibletts, I could see great beads of perspiration standing on his forehead.

"Go on," he said, hoarsely; "you have not told all yet."

"What else do you want?" demanded the old woman, sullenly.

"I want you to make a clean breast of it, Mrs. Slokum; and I intend you to do it. You have told me too much or too little; you have let out only a little of a dreadful secret I never guessed at; and if you don't confess all to me, here and now, before I leave this room, as I am a living

man, you shall confess it to a magistrate before you and I are a day older."

The old woman shrunk from the fierce and determined gaze of the speaker; and it seemed to me then that she felt powerless to resist the spell so suddenly and unexpectedly cast upon her. Certain it is that every syllable she uttered fell from her lips with undisguised reluctance; but she did not cease speaking until her story was told, except when an occasional short, stern question was put to her by her interrogator, when that story seemed to want clearness. I shall not follow the course of the confession in the words of the miserable woman; but will content myself with giving its substance in connexion with what afterwards came to my knowledge from other sources. It was this:

From the day of the hurried departure of Captain Warren from Greenhurst, his young wife had sunk into a state of profound and painful melancholy, which was occasionally increased and deepened almost to temporary insanity, when day after day passed by, and no letter or other tidings reached her from her absent husband. In one of these lapses, the unfortunate lady had gone to the next town, under the pretext of having some purchases to make, and had there procured a small phial of laudanum, but for what purpose was

not very clear. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that she was innocent of any suicidal intention; for the deadly poison was suffered to lie openly on her dressing-table, until it was removed by her landlady, who, very properly as it may fairly be argued, objected to its being so exposed.

A month passed away, and still no tidings reached the cottage concerning the absent husband; and every morning renewed with greater intensity the mental sufferings of Mrs. Slokum's lodger as the time for the post delivery drew near.

At length a letter came; not, however, for Mrs. Warren, but for her landlady; but when opened, it contained an enclosure, carefully sealed, and directed to the young wife. With frantic eagerness, she snatched this letter from Mrs. Slokum's hand, tore it open and glanced over the first page, then uttered a piercing cry and fainted.

For the time, the curiosity of the landlady gave way to feelings of alarm, if not of compassion, for her unfortunate lodger; and her attentions were so far successful that, after an hour's insensibility, succeeded by strong hysterics, the young wife's senses returned, and, by the persuasions as well as with the assistance of her only attendant, she retired to her chamber. During the whole of this time, the fatal letter was tightly clutched in her

hand; but before Mrs. Slokum left her to the repose she seemed to need, she had locked it in a small writing-desk. The repose was of short continuance. The agitation of mind of which the young wife was the subject brought on symptoms which a person of Mrs. Slokum's experience could not misunderstand. "I sent for you at once, doctor; you can't say that I neglected anything there," said the old woman, when she had arrived at this part of her confession.

"Go on," said Mr. Tibletts, in a voice so unlike his own, that it would have startled me if I had not been preoccupied by horrible anticipations of what was to follow; anticipations which, to his mind, must have been certainties. Mrs. Slokum, however, seemed not to notice the altered tone, any more than she did the stern and almost vengeful expression which had fastened itself on the usually good-natured face of the village apothecary; and she proceeded with her tale.

A child was born—poor little baby Florence—and the doctor remained for hours in the cottage, applying such restoratives from time to time as were needed to call back and strengthen the feeble flickering life of the young mother. At last, these efforts seemed to succeed; and Mr. Tibletts returned to his own house for a few hours' rest, promising to look in again in the morning, and leav-

ing a composing draught to be given to the young mother, if she should be either restless or in pain.

Thus far, it is fair to believe, Mrs. Slokum's proceedings had been straightforward and blameless; but, left alone with the patient, a strong desire took possession of her mind to learn the contents of the letter which had produced so powerful and unhappy an effect. But, to obtain temporary possession of that letter, she must first of all lull the patient to repose. The composing draught *might* have answered the purpose; but, to make assurance doubly sure, this was set aside, and was replaced by the phial of laudanum. * *

Half an hour later, and the young mother was in a sleep so sound and deep that there was no fear of her awakening. Passing the light before her face to be assured of this, and satisfied by her regular, heavy breathing, that she would probably slumber for some hours, the wretched nurse abstracted the key of the desk from the pocket of the unfortunate lady, and, the next minute, the letter was in her hand.

Mrs. Slokum was not a rapid reader, but she knew there was no hurry, and she sat down to her nefarious task. The letter was not in the husband's handwriting; it was written by a stranger. It stated that the Captain had met with a serious accident in travelling; that he was incapable of

holding a pen, and had employed the writer to break the news to his Florence,—also to enclose two bank notes for ten pounds each, which he was then able to send her, and which she need not acknowledge, because, as soon as he was convalescent, he should return to Greenhurst,—his accident having so disabled him, that he would never again be fit for service, and must inevitably retire from his profession.

Probably this was as far as the unfortunate young wife had read, for, after a few more words, another page began; and in further unfolding the letter, the bank notes fell into Mrs. Slokum's lap. Securing these, she read what followed. It was not much; it consisted altogether of loving messages to his darling Florence, and entreaties that she would not be too greatly concerned for her husband, who was hers devotedly until death should separate them; and then there was a feeble attempt at signing a name, but evidently the pen had dropped from the husband's hand, after making a few illegible scratches.

But there was a postscript by the writer of the note, to the effect that he was concerned to add that very faint hopes were entertained of the injured Captain's recovery; and that he felt it his duty to advise the lady to whom he had the honour of writing, to hasten with all speed to her husband.

She had read as far as this, Mrs. Slokum said—and it was remarkable how retentive her memory must have been, to enable her to unwind the narrative thus clearly—she had read as far as this when she was alarmed by the altered breathing of the young mother; and turning to the bed——

"Wretched woman! and you live to tell of your atrocious deed!" exclaimed Mr. Tibletts, when his patient had reached this part of her confession.

"Live! why shouldn't I live, doctor? You live; why shouldn't I?"

"Go on; say what more you have got to say before I——Go on," said the apothecary, after a strong effort to control his feelings.

"I didn't want her to die; I did all I could to wake her up, you know I did. I didn't think the stuff I gave her was so strong," whined the old creature. "It wasn't my fault," she added; "she shouldn't have died if I could have helped it. I didn't give her enough of the stuff to kill a child; it was only to make her sleep, and it would have been all the same——"

"Silence, woman!"

"You know it would, doctor; you said so when you thought it was *your* stuff she had taken. It would have been all the same if she hadn't taken it, you said. Ha, ha!" and the wretch absolutely

laughed. Heaven preserve me from ever hearing such another laugh!

"You know how nicely she was laid out when you came in, the next morning, and you——"

"Leave that out, and go on with your miserable story," said Mr. Tibletts; "you need not tell me that I saw the poor dead mother. What became of the letter? You never told me of the letter."

No, nor any one else; why should she? Mrs. Slokum wanted to know. What business was it of anybody's? And if the devil had tempted her —well, yes then she had begun, and she would go on with it. "But you will be good, doctor, and set me up again, if I tell you all? I can't die yet. I am not so old as my mother was when she died, by half a score of years; and what should I go off so soon for? Come now, doctor," and she went on so long in this wheedling style that it was difficult to get her back again to the point from which she had diverged. Evidently, the dread of death, and the belief that the doctor could, if he would, drive away "the last enemy" for an indefinite season, had urged and still urged her to make confession to him. And she went on, in effect, thus:

The sight of the money—those crisp bank notes —was too much for her. It was a temptation she had not strength of principle to resist; and with

the corpse of her victim before her, she had, calmly enough, sat down to calculate probable contingencies. She was not long in arriving at a conclusion. There was risk; but greater risks had been run for a smaller prize, and she would destroy the letter, and keep the money.

But then there was the living baby; the unconscious infant which had lain so peacefully and quietly by its mother's side, while that mother was passing away. Well, there was not much difficulty about that, and how Mrs. Slokum had contrived to evade any responsibility in the matter has already been shown.

From this point, Mrs. Slokum's confession was disjointed, fragmentary, and mysterious. To escape from the stings of conscience, the wretched creature gave way to the habit of dram-drinking, in which she had previously been known to indulge; but what drove her away from Greenhurst was the ghost.

"The ghost! you vile woman?" exclaimed the apothecary, who seemed to feel some little relief in now and then hurling an adjective at Mrs. Slokum's head.

"Yes, the ghost; and why not? Were there not ghosts walking about always?"

"The ghost was in your soul, woman; no wonder the poor young mother was——"

"It wasn't her," said the patient with a shudder; it was *him*. "It was one night when I was up late, and the door opened, and in *he* walked."

"He! who do you mean? what are you talking about?"

"It was the Captain's ghost, as sure as I am here now, doctor; his face was white, and his eyes burnt like fire in his head, and when he spoke his voice was——"

"He spoke, then?" Well, I suppose he told you you were drunk?" interposed Mr. Tibletts, bitterly and incredulously.

She would not deny that she had been drinking, Mrs. Slokum went on; but she knew what she was about well enough to hear the ghost tell her, in a hollow voice, to go before him and show him where his murdered wife was buried. And she was obliged to do his bidding, and went on and on to the churchyard, the ghost following, in the same long cloak, or the shadow of it, that he used to wear when he was a living man; that she went right into the churchyard, and pointed to the grave, and then fell down in a swoon; and that when she came to her senses, the ghost was gone.

I cannot describe any more of this strange scene with Mr. Tibletts' patient, for I took an early opportunity of slipping, unperceived, out of

the chamber. A few minutes afterwards, I was joined by my companion.

"What do you think of all this, Sid.?" said he, presently, as we walked on, arm in arm. He was greatly agitated, though he strove to hide it.

"Think of what, Mr. Tibletts; the ghost?"

"No, no, that's easily explained. The wretched old hag drank herself into delirium tremens before she left Greenhurst; and in one of these fits her evil conscience conjured up in her imagination the churchyard scene. All fancy, that, Sidney."

"But might not it have been ——?"

"Our poor Florence's father himself, in the flesh, you would ask. No, I don't believe it. It is pretty certain that he did die ——"

"But you did not give any credence to that story I told you when I was down here last—the coachman's story, I mean?"

"No, I did not believe it then, Sid.—that is, I did not believe it had anything to do with our Captain; but I have made inquiries since, which have led me to alter my opinion; and this letter that Mrs. Slokum speaks about seems to confirm it."

"But if he did recover?

"If he did recover, what was to hinder his coming back, like an honest man, by broad daylight, Sid., instead of appearing to a drunken old woman, and then vanishing in a churchyard?"

"Well, then, sir, if he did not recover of the injuries he received, his reputation is cleared, and that is something."

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Tibletts, testily. "The fact is, I don't believe there ever was a Captain Warren; it was only a *nom de guerre;* and if you only knew half the trouble I had at the time in hunting up proofs and following up clues, you would say so too. No, no; it is not worth while to go over that ground again. Florence's father is a myth and a mystery; so let it be. If he is alive (which I don't believe), he knows where to come when he wants to find his daughter; and if he does not choose to come, why he is better away."

I thought so too, and there that matter dropped.

"It was the old creature's confession of—of that dreadful deed, sir; what do you think of that?" asked Mr. Tibletts, nervously.

I scarcely knew what to reply, and I said so.

"Sidney, a load has been taken off my heart, and a load has been put on it," continued the apothecary, greatly agitated. "Many and many a time I would have given all I am worth to have been assured that my want of attention and skill had nothing to do with that poor lady's death; and now I don't know that I would not give as much to have the knowledge I have obtained can-

celled. To think of her being drugged to death in that way; it is fearful. But that is not the point now. The knowledge has come to us, what are we to do with it?"

"What can be done with it, Mr. Tibletts?"

"Yes, that's what I say—what can be done with it, Sid.?"

"Nothing," said I; "what would be the use? Suppose you were to make a stir about it, Mr. Tibletts, and have Mrs. Slokum's confession made public, and prove it home to her——"

"Oh, that wouldn't do; there would be no proving anything, and if there were, why the old creature won't live a month, anyhow."

"Well then, what can be done, Mr. Tibletts?" said I again, talking in a circle.

"Nothing; you said nothing, and I say nothing. You wouldn't tell your aunts, would you?"

"I think not," said I.

"No," said he; "what would be the use? And you wouldn't tell Florence, I suppose?"

"No, no; how could you think of such a thing?"

"*I* shouldn't think of such a thing," said the apothecary; "and if you wouldn't——"

"I should deserve to have my tongue cut out if I did."

"Very well; then it all ends in nothing, and

only you and I are the wiser," said Mr. Tibletts: "and, after all," he added, "I am not sure that the poor young mother would have lived through it."

"It is not worth while to go over that," said I; for the subject was an uncomfortable one, and I wanted to dismiss it; "but what surprises me is, how you came to know that the poor wretch had anything on her mind."

"Does it? Now really there is nothing surprising in it. Can you guess, Sid., how many patients I have ever had who have not had anything on their minds to trouble them? You might almost count them on your ten fingers. But, to tell the truth, I had heard from the workhouse nurse something about the old creature's mutterings in her sleep; and, putting this and that together, I could guess pretty well where the shoe pinched."

"Oh! By the way, how came Mrs. Slokum back to Greenhurst; and how long has she been here?"

"She has been here a week; and she came back with a parish pass. She has been living a horrid kind of life in a town twenty miles off, till she fell upon the parish, and then they sent her home."

By this time we had reached Virginia Cottage;

and Mr. Tibletts, refusing to pay his respects to my aunts, because he "wasn't equal to it just then," passed on to his own home. And then came fairy footsteps, and the sweetest countenance I had ever known, or have ever since seen in mortal life and in all my wanderings, and a soft confiding voice like gentle music—

"Oh, Sid.; brother Sid., what a runaway you are! and what a false knight! You promised to walk with me this morning; and you have been with Mr. Tibletts."

"Did I promise, Florence? Well, I am ready to go now."

"Ah, but you are too late, Sid. See, I have another knight now;" and Fenwick Ross sprang forward.

I hadn't seen Fenwick for a year; and our greeting was as hearty as friendship could make it. Fenwick was in his first year at Cambridge; but he was at home for vacation. I had not heard of this before.

He did not cheat me out of my walk with Florence, however; we all three went together — not that day only, but many succeeding days. At last my month's holiday expired.

CHAPTER VI.

MEMORY AGAIN.

Once more a mist rises on the disc of memory: and shadow after shadow appears, disappears, and reappears as I strive to look back upon the past. There is the dark and dusty counting-house in —— Lane, with the old clerks at their desks, and my Uncle Ezekiel in his inner sanctum, sometimes peering out through the glazed partition. There is that everlasting correspondence to copy:—but another has taken my place in the corner, while I am dipping deeply into ledgers and studying the mysteries of prices current.

Then the scene changes; and I am in my solitary chamber at my uncle's. It is midnight and moonlight at midsummer; and I sit at my window apostrophising the lady moon, and wondering whether she shines as brightly on the fields, and woods, and river at Greenhurst, as on the roofs and chimney-tops which look down upon me in my lonely state. And then I think of my three aunts, and Mr. Tibletts, and Fenwick Ross, and Mrs. Slokum who has been long dead, and of Florence.

More shadows. Years have passed away. I am again at Greenhurst. Time has not been inactive: Aunt Mary tells me that books are not printed so clearly as they used to be, and she has taken to spectacles. I see also that her brown hair, parted so smoothly over her clear forehead, shows streaks of silvery whiteness; and she the youngest of Mr. Tibletts' 'three Graces!' Mr. Tibletts himself has become bald, and stout, and ruddy. He has retired from practice; for he found a difficulty in mounting stairs day after day, he says; and likes his bed too well to be roused out of it at all hours of the night. I suspect that he has feathered his nest pretty comfortably, which may be the true reason of his present idleness; aud I tell him so. "You know nothing about it, Sid.," he replies, gruffly; but presently he invites me into his house, and shows me his Will. "There," says he, "that is all the money I ever made by physic; and that is what I mean to do with it—if I shouldn't happen to ——"

"To what, Mr. Tibletts?" I ask innocently.

"Oh, you know well enough," he answers; and I guess he is thinking of Virginia Cottage.

"Why don't you, then, Mr. Tibletts?" I want to know.

"Never mind," says he, desperately, "there's time enough yet; and that isn't the question now,"

he adds, poking the "last will and testament" into my hand. So I read.

"All to Florence Warren?"

"To be sure; who else should I leave it to? I have no kith or kin. And hasn't she the biggest claim on me? Think, Sid.; she would have had it before now, only your aunts are so perverse.

"Are they?"

"Are they! as if you didn't know that," he replies, laughing; "but they shan't hinder my portioning her off when she marries; mark that, Sid."

"If she ever should marry, you mean."

"Oh, she'll marry,—no fear of that," says the ex-apothecary.

Why does Mr. Tibletts show me his will? I do not want to see it. Florence marry! Well, why not? And I walk away, grumbling in my heart.

Then comes Florence before me, as she was then, brightening the mist with her shadowy presence; but before I can grasp it, it fades away, and soft music falls on my ear.

More years, and other mists and shadows. I am saying good-bye to Greenhurst. My aunts are sorrowful.

"Three years is a long time to be away from us," sighs Aunt Elizabeth; "and so far away, too,"

adds Aunt Martha, with tears in her eyes; "and before you come back, we may be separated," continues Aunt Mary.

"Nonsense, Miss Mary," says Mr. Tibletts, in a low growl. "I beg your pardon, Miss Mary; but who is going to part you, do you suppose?"

"We may be one or all dead before Sidney returns from China," Aunt Mary explains, meekly. She is so used to Mr. Tibletts' good-humoured growls that she puts up with them as a matter of course, as she would with those of a tame bear. So do we all.

"Dead!" shouts the ex-apothecary, whose thoughts, probably, are running upon something else; "don't you believe it, Sid. No finer constitutions in Greenhurst, nor half so fine."

"I wont believe it," say I; "you must take care of my aunts, Mr. Tibletts."

"Wont I?"

"But for all that, Aunt Mary, dear aunts all, it is not too late to revoke. Say the word, and I will not go."

"It is right you should go," replies Aunt Elizabeth, gently; "we all come to that conclusion, don't we, dears? Your Uncle Ezekiel (though we can never feel so cordially towards him as we could wish) has dealt generously with you; and now that your poor Aunt Bell is dead and gone, you must more than ever try to return his kindness;

and if it is to his interests for you to take this long voyage, and be so long absent, you ought to go, and not consider us, Sidney."

Another shadow. I see myself as I was then, and Florence Warren hangs on my arm as we pace to and fro the gravel path in the garden, with Lady Moon shining down upon us.

"I cannot believe that I am not to see you again for three whole long years," she says, looking up into my face; and I fancy there are tears ready to start from her blue eyes, but I may be mistaken.

"It is true, for all that, Florence."

"And you talk so coolly about it too, Sidney," she says, half-reproachfully.

"Do I, Florence?"

"Do you not? But it is nothing to you, I suppose." Does Florence think so? I wonder to myself.

"If you loved me half so much as you used to do, brother Sidney," she begins, and then the tears really do begin to flow.

"If!"

Why don't I tell her that I love her a thousand-fold better? Oh, Mr. Tibletts, why did you show me your Will, three years ago?

Another shadow. Fenwick Ross. We are together on the river.

"It was just here that you saved my life," he says, as we row along; and he adds, "I wonder if you will ever wish you had let me go to the bottom." He laughs as he says this.

"Fenwick!"

"I don't suppose you ever will, though. I say, Sidney, I wish I could go abroad with you."

"What a strange wish from you!"

"I do wish it, though: it would keep me out of mischief, perhaps; but——"

"Nonsense: you are going to Lincoln's Inn; and you won't have much opportunity for mischief there. By the time I am back you will be so bewigged and begowned that I shall not dare to know you."

"If I thought so, Sidney," he says, "the gown and the wig should go to the bottom of the sea, before I would touch them."

There is a strange restlessness about Fenwick Ross at this time. But no wonder. We have always been such friends; and to-morrow we shall be parted.

More mists and shadows. I am on the sea. The sails are spread, and we are speeding down the Channel merrily. I stand on the deck, and watch the white cliffs of home-land as they fade

away in the twilight. Another day, and another; and then there is nothing but the deep blue sea below, and the sky above.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHADOW IN THE HEART.

Five years had passed away, and I was on my way home. Many circumstances had happened by which my stay at Canton had been prolonged: the last of these circumstances was a serious illness, which had, at one time, threatened a fatal termination. Indeed, I was only slowly recovering from the effects of disease, when I embarked in a homeward-bound merchant ship. At this time I was nearly thirty years old.

I was unhappy; probably my recent illness had left behind it not only much physical, but even a greater degree of, or, at any rate, a liability to, mental depression. At times, existence seemed to be—seemed? it was—a heavy burden; and past, present, and future were alike gloomy and desolate. A horrible darkness surrounded me, like an impenetrable mist; and shadows of past events,

mingling with anticipations of the future, were cast upon it in terrible distinctness. But I will not dwell upon this.

The voyage home was lengthened by our ship having to put in at Calcutta, in the interests of its owners; and several weeks elapsed before we were once more at sea.

There were at first but few passengers on board; but we had received an accession to the number at Calcutta,—one in particular whom it may be as well to describe here. He was a person of gentlemanly appearance and manners; not much, if anything, past what is generally termed middle age. His countenance was strikingly handsome, though evidently bearing marks of infirm health and long residence in India. He was slightly lame also; at least, there was a perceptible halt in his gait, so as to render the constant use of a walking-stick almost a necessity. It is needless to say that I did not at first make these observations as feeling, in the morbid state of my mind, any interest in one who was to be my fellow-passenger, but as simple facts which were, in some degree, forced upon my knowledge.

I may add,—what did not come to me by observation, but from information directly volunteered by our Captain,—that Mr. Coverley (this was his name) was a very rich man,—"a nabob,

in fact," said Captain Green, with a knowing shrug of his shoulders; and that he had made a great deal of money in the East India Company's civil service, besides being the inheritor of considerable estates in England, to take possession of which he was now going home, having given up his appointment in India.

Whether or not this were true, it made little difference to me, I thought; though I remember now that I began to harbour a prejudice against Mr. Coverley because of his reputed wealth;—not that I particularly envied him, so much as that I anticipated annoyance from the overbearing exactions which I believed to be always, or nearly always, the accompaniments of wealth thus obtained.

I soon found myself mistaken in this particular, however. No one could be more simple and unassuming than this passenger: he did not seek, nor would he receive, attentions which would have denoted a difference in his favour between himself and his fellow-passengers. Thus much, then, for my prejudices. And now, dismissing Mr. Coverley to the next chapter, let me lift a little corner of the veil, and call back for a moment one of the shadows that then darkened my heart.

My cabin was so far commodious and pleasant, that I could, without great discomfort, seclude my-

self from the other passengers; and there I often sat alone.

My desk was one day open before me, and a packet of letters was in my hand. They were letters which, from time to time, I had received from Greenhurst. Most of them were written by my aunts,—either jointly or severally; and they were full of love and anxious care. But among them werea few from Florence. I took these from among the rest, opened them and read them for the last time, until many, many years had passed away.

They were very affectionate letters—the breathings of a loving, pure, and unsuspecting heart. She called me in them her brother—her dear, her very dear brother Sidney. She told me the news of the village; reminded me (though I needed not this) of bygone days when, under my protection, she had roamed through the surrounding woods; she wrote about her mother's grave, and told me that the wood violets I had helped her to plant round it were still living and in full bloom; in proof of this she had sent me one "precious little flower," to put me in mind of it and of her. The "precious little flower," withered, shrunken, and scentless, was there still. She gently complained that I never wrote to her—"to me, by myself—me," was her expression. Was it very selfish in her,

she asked me, to wish I would now and then write if it were only twenty words that she might have and treasure up as her own? But perhaps I had forgotten my little sister Florence, though, could she really believe it of me, it would make her heart ache very much indeed.

Then came another letter, acknowledging and thanking me for complying with her "foolish request," and enclosing a little lock of her hair which I had asked for. She was glad and grateful that so slight a thing could gratify her absent brother Sidney:—yes, it was her brother,—always her brother.

There were two or three letters, more lately written. It was plain to see in them the advance of Florence from girlhood towards womanhood. There was the same pure and generous affection, but it was differently expressed; the same freedom of thought, but a change of topics. And it was to her *brother* she wrote—always her brother.

In one of these letters, and only in one, she mentioned the name of my old boyish companion and still friend, Fenwick Ross; and then it was in answer to a question I had put to my Aunt Mary.

"Aunt Mary desires me to say," she wrote; and then went on to tell me that Fenwick had almost forsaken the cottage. It was very rarely in-

deed that he called; and then only to ask if my aunts had heard again of me. This conduct was so strange that my aunts feared they had in some way offended him; or else, it might be, that all inducement to keep up friendship was gone now that I was so far away. Certainly, Fenwick Ross was the greater part of his time in London; but he was often at Greenhurst notwithstanding.

Then the letter went on to say that Fenwick's father had recently begun to build largely on a part of his property where a mineral spring had some time before been discovered; and his head was full of plans for a town which he had designed—or rather which an architect had designed for him, and which was to be called Ross Town. There were to be baths, and pump rooms, an assembly room, and a large hotel to begin with; and the foundations of the hotel were already laid.

(I may just remark that this was not unexpected news to me. I had heard something about this design before I left England. It had been a pet project of Mr. Ross for some years.)

This was almost the last of Florence's letters; and having read them, one by one, I put them in an envelope, and sealed them up.

There were two other letters which I kept apart. They were from Fenwick Ross, my old boyhood's friend. The first had reached me a few weeks

before my illness came on. It required an effort now to reopen and re-read it; but I did it at last: a part of it ran thus:

"And now, dear Bell, I am come to the gist of this epistle. Do you remember the last time we were together—that evening before you left Greenhurst?—Of course you do, though. Well, you recollect my wondering whether you would ever regret saving my life when we were boys; and also my wishing I was going with you, because it would keep me out of mischief? You wondered what I could mean; but my words had a meaning.

"Sidney, by all our old friendship, by our past unlimited and unsuspicious confidence, I adjure you tell me—do you love Florence Warren, so love her—not as the brother which she calls you, but which you are not—as to make her your wife? Am I right in half believing this; or has my jealous watchfulness deceived me?

"I will never be your rival. The persuasion that I was in danger of behaving treacherously towards you, my best friend, has kept me so long silent—has made me a stranger where some of the happiest hours of my life have been past; has subjected me to the charge of heartlessness and pride, and fickleness in friendship. Until last week I had not been near the cottage for months. I went then because I knew that Florence was from

home, and to hear—if it were to be heard—what would——

"Why am I writing all this? Sidney, I love Florence Warren—it is no boyish fancy; you and I are surely, both of us, beyond this; but I love her with all the strength of manhood. I have told no one this before. *She* does not—cannot expect it. Judging from my conduct, she must suppose that I almost hate her.

"Three years and more have passed away, and you have been silent, but not more silent than I. But you have had no reason for this; and of late a hope has sprung up in my heart that I have been tormenting myself with unreal phantoms. Tell me; have I?

"Write only a line. Say that I have been right in my conjectures, and—— No, I will never be your rival, Sidney. I will overcome, as I best may, my unhappy attachment; and none, with a true heart, shall breathe warmer wishes for your success than I; and none but you shall ever know from me, the folly of which I have been guilty."

This was the letter; how I answered it I have but a dim remembrance; but, months later, I received a second letter from Fenwick, thanking me for relieving his mind of a heavy load; and informing me, in rapturous terms, of the happiness I had imparted. With my full and unrestricted

consent (thus he wrote) he had become the suitor for Florence's hand, she had consented to be his, and his father had interposed no obstacles to the union; they waited only my return, and then ——

* * * * *

And I was on my way home for this! Do you wonder at the shadow in my heart?

For——. But I am not writing a love story.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE SHADOW OF A GREAT ROCK IN A WEARY LAND."

I WAS on deck. It was night; but so lovely a night that it was pleasanter to be there than below. Besides, my day's occupation had "murdered sleep." Mind and body were alike fevered and restless; so, with unequal steps I paced the deck, sometimes staying to lean over the bulwarks, and then renewing my solitary walk.

Besides the watch on deck, there was another idler like myself—Mr. Coverley.

We were two or three weeks out of port; but hitherto the intercourse between Mr. Coverley and

myself had been restricted to a few daily common places: and now we passed and repassed each other more than once, almost in silence. But presently, when I again halted to look over the ship's side, I felt a hand gently laid on my arm. On looking round, I saw my fellow-passenger by my side.

"Do I take too great a liberty, Mr. Bell? We seem both in the same mood. Shall we be friends; or must we still be strangers?"

There was so much suavity as well as good-nature in the words as well as the look by which they were accompanied, that I had no power to resist the invitation,—so far, at least, as to walk side by side with the gentleman, leaving it with him, however, to open a conversation if it so pleased him. It did please him.

"Are you wise, my friend, in exposing yourself to the night air? Pardon the question: it is not an impertinent one. You have been ill, I know; you are not yet convalescent, I fear; and we hold that in this climate the loveliness of night is a treacherous decoy."

"So I believe, sir: but when a gentleman of your experience courts the danger, why should I take the trouble to avoid it?"

He smiled. "A fair question, but not a good argument," he said:—"I am not on the sick list

as you are, or ought still to be. Moreover I am acclimated. Thirdly, I am well wrapped up, you see,"—and he opened the large heavy cloak which was thrown over his shoulders, to show me that, underneath that, he had on a warmer coat than he ordinarily wore in the day-time ;—"while you," he added,—"are very lightly clad."

"I will follow your example thus far," I replied, taking up my own cloak, which I had brought on deck, but had laid down as unnecessary.

"Good," said he; "allow me to assist you;" and he adjusted the cloak for me :—"good so far, at least," he added; "unless you will take my better advice."

"I cannot sleep," I said;—and then we walked together several paces, in silence. It was once more broken by my companion.

"Mr. Bell,—permit me to ask you,—do you know anything about the religion of Jesus Christ?"

The question was so abrupt, so utterly unexpected, so unusual a question for one to receive from a comparative stranger, as well as so unlikely to be put, as I thought, by so gentlemanly and courteous and retiring a person as Mr. Coverley, that, for a moment or two, I was at a loss for a reply—at a loss even to decide whether I were offended or not at its strangeness. But it was put so kindly

and affectionately, that I could scarcely be angry. Still, it *was* a strange question; and I said so, rather carelessly.

"Is it really strange?" rejoined my companion: "perhaps it is. I am afraid it is. Pardon me: I have been so long a stranger to the etiquette of home life, that I may have lost some of its nicer customs. May I still further run the risk of giving offence by explaining why I have ventured to put so strange a question?"

I replied that offence was out of the question,—that I felt obliged to him for his concern on my behalf.

"My explanation is soon made," said my fellow-passenger; "I do not profess to be much of a physiognomist; but I can scarcely have been in your society, sir, now nearly three weeks, without perceiving that you are far from being happy."

"I am sorry that my looks should have been such tell-tales,—sorry, at least, if I could think my melancholy has been contagious," I replied.

"No, I do not say that. But you acknowledge, then, that I am right in my conjecture."

"Did you ever meet with any one who was perfectly happy, Mr. Coverley?" I asked, evasively.

"Perfectly? That is very comprehensive, Mr. Bell; and he would be a bold man who should say that. Perfectly happy? No, scarcely. Per-

fection demands security, continuance; and the very uncertainty of the possession forbids perfection. Perfection is completeness. A work until it is completed cannot be perfect."

"True," said I.

"But if you ask whether I have seen any one generally and substantially happy, I have no hesitation in saying, yes,—and that, under no ordinary pressure of cares and anxieties, disappointments in life, losses and crosses." He spoke earnestly.

"Such an one must have found out a valuable secret, then," I said.

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Coverley; "if it is valuable to be able to draw the sweetest consolations from the most unpromising events."

"And how is this to be done?" I asked, with very little interest, however.

"By faith in Christ," said my companion, without any hesitation; "by walking by faith, and not by sight; by fixing the eye of faith on Him who, to mortal vision, is invisible; by casting our cares upon Him; by communion with Him; by knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God."

I had heard all this before; of course I had; but never so impressively. The earnestness of the speaker, perhaps, had something to do with this; but probably my own feelings at that time

added weight to the few simple words he spoke. I longed for—oh, how much!—some quiet, firm resting-place for my restless mind.

"I asked you just now," continued Mr. Coverley, "if you knew anything about the religion of Jesus Christ. The question, perhaps, was rude, but it was not rudely meant. I saw you were in trouble, and I wished to tell you how trouble may be conducive even to happiness, and turned into joy. I can speak of this, because I have experienced it. Shall I tell you how the experience came to me?"

"I should be glad to know," I said.

"More than twenty years ago," said my companion, "I left England; I was steeped in misery. My fairest prospects had been blasted, my dearest hopes had been laid low—they were buried in the grave. I was in a wretched state of health, too; and I may add that, though eventually I partially recovered, as I was told I might do, in an eastern climate, I have never known what robust health means, from that day to this.

"Well, I reached India, and with a recklessness bordering upon madness, I rushed into the excesses of gay life, with the determination, if possible, to drown sorrow. I did not expect to live many years, perhaps not many months, and I had no wish to prolong life. I need not tell you what

my course was; you can fancy it if you will, and the consequences may be easily guessed. I was soon stricken down with sickness; and death—the death which I had provoked and challenged—stared me in the face.

"I was at that time living in a bungalow, a few miles up the country, surrounded only by native servants. One day I received a visit from a fellow-countryman whom I had never before seen, and who was going still further into the country. You will not be surprised that I urged him, stranger as he was, to stay with me, as a relief from the monotonous solitude of my existence. He complied, and was my guest that day and the next, and the next. On the fourth day, he and his slender retinue of attendants left me, and many years passed before I again met with him.

"That stranger, Mr. Bell, was a true disciple and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw in me, as I have presumed to see in you, only more plainly in my case than in yours, that I was heart-burdened. By some means or other, which I cannot exactly recall, I was induced to tell him what that burden was. He listened to me with very great kindness and sympathy, and then he asked me what I have asked you. I frankly confessed that I knew, and cared to know, nothing of the subject which he had introduced. But he

would not be repulsed. He spoke to me about Jesus—the loving friend of the sorrowful—the consoler, the healer, the Saviour; he implored me to take shelter in Him, as in '*the Shadow of a great Rock, in a weary land.*' I could not help being struck with this figure as very beautiful: I think it is so now; but let this pass.

"Mr. Bell, the conversation and the prayers of that traveller produced a mighty effect on my mind. By the good Spirit of God my heart was opened to receive the things of which he spoke; but it was not until after he had left me again in my solitude that I could think calmly and quietly. But I had a Bible with me, and, for the first time for many years, I opened it, praying as I best could, for divine light to guide me. My prayers, ignorant and imperfect as they were, were answered; divine light was given, so that I could see, though dimly, that peace and rest were to be found, even in the midst of sorrows; that there was One, omnipotent to bless, who said to me—who says to all—'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' By God's mercy, Mr. Bell, I did not turn away from the invitation. I found rest; and I can say now, with confidence, that the religion of Jesus Christ is the great—the one desideratum for turning sorrow into joy; the grand elixir of

human happiness; it 'has promise of the life that now is,' as well as 'of that which is to come.'

"Do you wonder, my friend," continued the speaker, "that I should speak to others of that which I have 'tasted and handled and felt;' and should echo, however imperfectly and faintly, the invitation, 'O taste, and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusteth in him'?"

* * * * *

I retired to my cabin at midnight, but not to rest.

* * * * *

The voyage was nearly over. The white cliffs of England were in sight, and I stood on the deck gazing on them with full eyes and a light heart, as we beat up the channel.

Mists and shadows had, for the time, disappeared, all but that "Shadow of a great Rock in a weary land," to which, by God's grace, I had attained. Yes, those few words, spoken by a stranger, had been the means of working a great change in my whole soul. But I am not writing a history of religious experience, and I will not speak of this, except to say that, with new hopes and aspirations and determinations, with new aims and objects, happiness had beamed in upon my heart; not perfect happiness, indeed; for "a work until it is completed cannot be perfect;" but a

happiness, imperfect as it was, from which I had all my previous life been an alien.

My fellow-passenger stood by my side.

"We shall soon part company," he said; "for our captain tells me he must anchor in the Downs, and I shall land at Deal; but we shall meet again, I hope. When I know where I shall be settled down, I will write to you. You must give me your address."

I may remark here, as being somewhat singular, that though my intercourse with Mr. Coverley had been, during the greater part of the voyage, in many respects close and confidential, he had never cared to ask for, nor had I happened to mention, any particulars relating to my previous life in England. I thought of this when I pencilled down my uncle Ezekiel's address, and told him that I should be sure to be found or heard of there.

A few hours more, and the anchor was dropped off Deal, and boats came out to the homeward-bound merchant ship. One of these, Mr. Coverley engaged to take him on shore, with some part of his luggage. We shook hands on parting. "We shall meet again," he said.

CHAPTER IX.

MARRIED.

So Florence Warren was married, and I was her brother still, her dear brother, as she called me again and again, when we met, after that long absence.

And I was contented that it should be so. Florence had never known—never suspected—the love I had borne to her—the day-dreams in which I had permitted myself to indulge. I rejoiced that she had not: the knowledge would have been exquisitely torturing to her gentle, affectionate heart; for she could not have returned *that* love; it rested elsewhere.

I never dreamed of this before leaving England; but when Fenwick's first letter reached me my eyes were opened; and then it was,—"How blind I must have been not to see this long ago!"

Now you know, reader, why I wrote to him in reply as I did. Was I to make two others unhappy because I was unhappy myself?—and one of those dearer to me than anything on earth? Besides,—I knew Fenwick's noble qualities,—and

how calculated he was to make Florence happy,—to say nothing of his prospects in life, so superior to my own, at their best and brightest.

I was present at the wedding: I 'gave Florence away,'—it was my part of the ceremony—and I was happy. Perfectly? No, not perfectly happy; this could not be; but I thank God, I can say that I did not repent then,—that I never have since repented—the (shall I say it?) the sacrifice which had been unconsciously exacted from me. Florence was happy, I knew this: how then could I be unhappy?

None there suspected the secret of my heart, or knew of the shadow which had rested there, but which had now passed away for ever.

My aunts were tearful and smiling, sad and joyful, by turns, on that eventful day; but not a tear was shed, nor a sigh breathed for "poor Sidney," as would have been had they known all. How thankful I was for that!

Fenwick, in the exuberance of his happiness and the lightness of his heart, shook hands with me again and again, and thanked me with glad tears in his eyes for having, as he said, put him out of his misery so promptly. And what an owl he had been, he said, laughing, to have taken such an absurd fancy into his head as to — but it was not absurd either, he added, interrupting himself, for

who could have known Florence and not loved her?

"And so, old fellow," he went on gaily, "though it is a good thing for me that it was so, I cannot help saying how ridiculously blind you must have been to dear Florence's superlative merits; and that I wonder at you for that more than I wonder at myself for my fears of your rivalry."

Mr. Tibletts had something to say, too. By the way, Mr. Tibletts was more rosy than ever; and as, during my absence, he had taken to spectacles and hair-powder, he looked quite venerable. Well, he had something to say. He took me aside, and held me by one of my coat-buttons.

"I say Sid.," said he;—"I had planned this in my mind a little differently. I thought at one time that Baby Florence would have been booked somehow in another direction. It is all very well as it is; but—"

I did not wait to hear any more, but gently extricated myself.

"We are all so glad that you came home in time, Sidney," said Aunt Mary, at another part of the day; "we were afraid at one time that Fenwick would not wait,—I don't think he would have waited much longer; and it would have been such a disappointment to us all,—to you, especially, would it not?"

"It would, indeed, Aunt Mary," I said.

"Yes, I knew it would, and I said so. And now, what do you think, Sidney? You hope this will be a happy match, do you not?"

"Indeed I do. I ardently hope and as firmly believe that it will."

"It is not always that marriage is a blessing," added Aunt Mary. "Indeed, sometimes I think that all the mischief in the world—"

"Yes, I know, Aunt Mary; but then you know all the good in the world as well, comes in by the same gate."

"Well, really, I never thought of that, Sidney, —not in so many words. But it is quite true, Sidney; and I will never rail at matrimony again, —if I can help it."

"I am afraid you will be rather dull without Florence," said I, changing the topic.

"I am afraid we shall, Sidney;" and Aunt Mary took off her spectacles, and put a handkerchief to her eyes; "but then, you know we have no right to be selfish."

"Selfish! you selfish—my aunts selfish! What an absurd idea!"

"There might be a danger of it Sidney; but we have striven against it, and prayed against it: and I hope if there was a disposition that way, it has been overcome. Besides," she added, cheer-

fully; "you know that though Florence's home is to be in London, she will often be down here; for Fenwick is to have rooms at Ross Place, and is to keep a separate establishment there when he pleases."

"I know," said I, "and that will be very pleasant for all parties."

"Yes, very, especially as old Mr. Ross is so agreeable to the marriage."

"Which has rather surprised me, all along, Aunt Mary," said I. "I was very much afraid that Fenwick would meet with opposition from that quarter. Not that Florence is not worthy of being the wife of a——of any one, in fact; but I should have feared—I did fear—that Mr. Ross might not have been so easily persuaded to give his consent."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Aunt Mary, rather drily. "By the way, Sidney, you have not seen Ross Town yet; of course you have not, as you only came down last night. But you must go and see what grand goings on there are there before you return to London."

I said that I certainly should; though I wondered what connexion there could be, even in Aunt Mary's mind, between Mr. Ross's ready consent to Fenwick's marriage, and the new town he was building. And I had no opportunity for asking

her, as we were interrupted here in our stolen conference.

Yes, they were married; Florence and Fenwick; and after the wedding they started off on a wedding tour, accompanied by Florence's bridemaid, who was Fenwick's young and pretty sister. They were to be a month absent; and then they were to return to Greenhurst and take up their abode for another month at Ross Place; then go to London to their newly furnished house there. I should say that Fenwick had begun to practise—at any rate, to make a show of practising, as a barrister, in one of the law courts; and that the time of his marriage was at the commencement of the long vacation. I question whether he would have lost much by being married and going on his tour in full term; for I believe he had no clients at that time.

The day after the wedding I called at Ross Place by appointment, and accompanied Fenwick's father to the new town he was building. I had been struck the day before with the great alteration visible in Mr. Ross; but now it was even yet more palpable. He was not so very old, not much over sixty, certainly; but he seemed haggard and worn. He was a large, tall, handsome gentleman,

and those about him might not have observed the gradual changes which I fancied time had made. To them he might be the same as he was five or six years before, when I last saw him; but, to me, he did not appear to be the same.

He was cheerful, however; indeed, he seemed in exuberant spirits; and talked, in his old (I must say it, though he was the father of my dear friend)—in his old pompous, condescending way, about the great things he was doing for the neighbourhood. Certainly, judging from the plans he laid before me, and the ground that was laid out for building-plots, and the foundations of squares and crescents already laid, and the large hotel which was nearly completed, and the pump rooms which were half way towards completion—I say, judging from these signs and tokens, Mr. Bell was doing very great things; and I said so.

And now, mists and shadows rise again. I see myself settled down at my old occupation, and the second in command in my uncle's house. My uncle is getting old and feeble; and he talks of giving me a partnership share in his business; but for some cause or other—perhaps the natural dilatoriness of old age—he defers this to some indefinite time. It is no matter; I have an ample salary, and am satisfied.

Fenwick Ross and Florence live in London the greater part of the year. Their house is in a quiet square a little westward of the city; and I often pass my evenings with them. I can do this without a pang. I am Florence's brother still; and Florence is my sister.

Another shadow—a second baby Florence. It is a pleasant theme for memory to dwell upon.

More shadows.—Time deals leniently and kindly with Aunt Elizabeth, Aunt Martha, and Aunt Mary. I am afraid to think how aged they are becoming; but there are no signs of decay. I see them sometimes at Virginia Cottage; and once—it was soon after the birth of baby—they all came together to London. A great and glorious event, that, to all concerned!

Another shadow.—Mr. Tibletts, much the same as when we saw him last, only that he sometimes complains of the gout.

More shadows.—Shadows of bricks and mortar, rising tier above tier, with Mr. Ross walking to and fro, and casting *his* shadow upon them.

CHAPTER X.

A SHADOW OVER GREENHURST.

One day, about three years after Florence's marriage, Mr. Tibletts burst in upon me at the counting-house in — Lane. I was alone in the inner office, of which I had long since taken possession, for Uncle Ezekiel had become too infirm in health to superintend his business.

Pale and agitated, Mr. Tibletts sank into a chair.

"Mr Tibletts!"

"A glass of wine, Sid.; brandy, anything," he said, faintly.

"My good friend, what is the matter? My aunts——"

"Oh, they are all well; they'll live through it. Never saw such women; I never did."

I had poured out a glass of port wine; he took it with a trembling hand, and drank it off at a gulp. "Another, Sid.; I have been travelling all night, and am but just got in; have had nothing, to speak of, pass my lips for four-and-twenty hours; another, Sid., and then I shall be able to tell you all about it."

I poured out another glass, and offered him a plate of biscuits, but he put them away with a motion of his hand.

"I couldn't eat; there" (emptying the glass), "I shall do now. But you had better take a glass, too, Sid.; you'll want it."

"What *is* the matter, Mr. Tibletts?"

"The matter! But why don't you drink? Take my advice."

"I would rather not. I want to know what has brought you to London."

"I'll tell you, Sid.; but shake hands first, and tell me you'll forgive me—if you can."

"I can readily promise that, my good friend," and I shook hands with Mr. Tibletts; "but you must tell me what there is to forgive."

"It was all my fault, Sid.; I advised them to do it. How could I tell how it was going to turn out? But I am in the same boat, too, and that's one comfort.

"You forget, Mr. Tibletts," said I, impatiently, "that you have not told me what is the matter."

"Everything is the matter," groaned the ex-apothecary. "There are your aunts; I don't see how I can ever look them in the face again; there's poor Florence and her husband; and—"

"But, to come to the point, my friend—"

"Well, to come to the point, then, everything is going *crash*, and we shall all be ruined together."

"Ruined! ruined!"

"Ah! I knew you wouldn't believe it; and I only wish I didn't, that's all."

"I do not understand you yet, Mr. Tibletts; but I must leave you to explain yourself in your own way." I said this as quietly as I could, and seated myself on my high stool.

"That's sensible, Sid.; now I see you can bear it, I'll tell you all. You know Mr. Ross?"

"It is scarcely necessary to ask this. Yes."

"And you have seen that precious Ross Town?"

"Of course."

"That's it, then."

"Am I to understand that Mr. Ross's speculation has failed?"

"I don't know about understanding it, Sid.; I don't pretend to understand it. But, without understanding it, it is as true as that you sit there so calmly. I wish I could doubt it, Sid.; but as true as that I am here living, that confounded Ross Town will be just the ruin of us all." And Mr. Tibletts, whose colour had returned, and from whose pores drops of perspiration began to ooze, mopped his face with his bandanna.

With a little more coherence, the ex-apothecary then explained that the buildings at Ross Town

had come to a stand-still for want of funds to carry them on. Worse than this, that Mr. Ross had so involved himself by his brick and mortar mania, that exposure and bankruptcy were apparently imminent. Worse still, the speculation was so completely at a dead-lock, that no capitalist would risk five pounds to put it back into working order. Mr. Ross had tried, in all quarters, privately, to obtain investments—in other words, to dispose of shares in his undertaking, and had met only with blunt refusals. To add to the hopelessness of his scheme, and to set the seal on his ruin, a celebrated physician had analysed, or pretended to analyse, the water from the mineral spring, and had written a long article in a medical journal, ridiculing its pretensions to any healing virtue, and charging the founders of these new "Wells," with impudence and quackery.

"It is easy to see the motive for that," growled Mr. Tibletts, when he came to this part of his story; "Dr. Lyncham is in the pay of the people at Cheltenham, to run down a new rival."

"Is that possible?" said I.

"Yes, Sid. It must be so. There's not the slightest difference. I have analysed too, and I can do that as well as any Dr. Lyncham that ever lived; and I say that the Greenhurst waters are as medicinal as the Cheltenham, or any other waters

I ever tasted. But that does n't signify. We are cried down, and there's an end of it."

I was not unprepared for this. I had heard whispers in commercial circles, of Mr. Ross's difficulties for some weeks past, and I had Mr. Ross's eager, restless, care-marked countenance before my mind's eye, but still—

"But still, Mr. Tibletts, even if it should come to the worst—"

"Oh, it will come to the worst, Sid.; there is no hope, not a bit; not a straw to lay hold of that I can see. Why—"

"Well then, say that the worst has already come, and that Mr. Ross cannot get out of it without loss—"

"He'll lose every penny, and serve him right," interposed Mr. Tibletts, impatiently.

"I cannot see what you or my aunts have to do with it, except by way of sympathy, and that you don't seem to have too much of, just now, Mr. Tibletts; as to Fenwick, it will be a sad blow to him; but we must help him to bear it, for Florence's sake, if not for his own. And he is gradually advancing now in his profession, so as to be nearly independent of any further help from his father."

"Yes, yes, that's all very pretty talking, Sid.; but, cool as you are, I have something else to tell you that will stir your blood a little," said he.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, didn't I say just now that I advised them to do it, and that I was in the same boat?"

"True; I had forgotten that. You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do mean; I mean that I was such an ass as to be talked over, four years ago, to draw out all my money, and hand it over to—"

"And my poor dear aunts? Oh, Mr. Tibletts, and do you—"

"I cannot help it now, Sid.," almost sobbed my poor old friend. "I deserved to be ruined for my folly; and it does not much matter what becomes of me. I can take to doctoring again, if that's all. But poor dear Miss Elizabeth, and Miss Martha, and Miss Mary, and poor Virginia Cottage!"

"Let us understand one another at once, my good friend. My aunts are involved in this failure of Mr. Ross's scheme?"

It was true enough. At the time Mr. Tibletts entrusted his whole fortune to the safe keeping of Mr. Ross, who was even then in want of money to carry out his building schemes, he had also half advised and half persuaded my aunts to follow his example, and, with the exception of a few hundred pounds, they drew out their

separate portions from the funds, and lent them to Mr. Ross on his own personal bond. One inducement to them to do this was the increased rate of interest they were offered which, though they did not covet for themselves, they were not unwilling to realise for Florence's sake and mine. But the great temptation was the knowledge that their compliance with Mr. Tibletts' advice would smooth down certain obstacles which they foresaw would otherwise be opposed to Fenwick's marriage. And, rail as they might, occasionally, against matrimony in general, when it came to particulars they were—— well, well, I need not expose the inconsistencies of my good, dear relatives; it would be well if everybody's inconsistencies were as amiable as theirs. But, setting this aside, I could account now, having heard Mr. Tibletts' story, for the readiness of Mr. Ross to receive Florence as his daughter-in-law.

"And so my poor aunts have risked, and will lose all?" I said, when Mr. Tibletts had brought his story nearly to a close.

"All but Virginia Cottage, and the few hundreds I told you of, and what may be scratched from the wreck and ruin—perhaps a shilling in the pound—perhaps not so much," groaned the ex-apothecary.

"And you, Mr. Tibletts?"

"Never mind about me; it serves me right."

"And Fenwick and Florence? But there will be nothing for them, of course?"

Mr. Tibletts shook his head. "And what galls me as much as anything, though it is all of a piece with the rest, the five hundred pounds that I put into Florence's hand, the day she was married, Sid., that's gone too."

Well, Mr. Tibletts, what is to be done?"

"That's what I say, Sid.; what's to be done? I came up, travelled all night, and here I am now, just to put it to you; what's to be done?"

"The first thing is, you must breakfast, or lunch, or dine, or take all three meals in one," (Mr. Tibletts shook his head again, but more dubiously than negatively, as I understood it, and as was afterwards proved), "the next thing will be to consult Uncle Ezekiel."

"Eh, what! The three Graces—"

"Mr. Tibletts!"

"Never mind, Sid., it was a slip. Your aunts wouldn't like this, I am afraid."

"I must act for them; I know Uncle Ezekiel better than they do, or ever can. For my own sake, and on my own account, I must consult him—must tell him all, Mr. Tibletts."

"You must do as you like and think best, Sid. Well, and what is the next thing to do?"

"That must depend partly on his advice. But I fancy the next thing to do will be to post down to Greenhurst."

"But there are Fenwick and Florence; we must let them into it somehow."

"Time enough for that. Fenwick is out of town, on circuit, so we must do as well as we can without him. He knows nothing of his father's embarrassments at present, I am sure; and it will be better for him not to know of them till his return; that is, if they can be kept from him; and as to Florence—"

* * * * *

And now through the mists of memory, rises the shadow of an aged man, trembling, and bowed down, yet not so much with the weight of years as by conflict of heart. I hear his voice, it is trembling, too, with emotion.

"Sidney, my life has been a mistake—partly. I thank God, I can say, only partly; for I trust I have not mistaken the right foundation; but partly, because I have not built upon that foundation as I might have built and ought to have built. There has been too much 'wood, hay, stubble,' Sidney; you know what I mean. And when that comes to be tried—to be tried with fire—no wonder that I 'suffer loss,' though I trust I myself shall be saved, 'yet as by fire.'

"Hear me, Sidney. I began my mistakes by wrapping myself up in my own integrity. I said 'These are my principles, I will frame my life by them, and I will judge others by them. I will make no allowance for the mistakes of others, I will have no foolish compassion on the feeble and erring.' I remembered where it is written 'Do justly.' Yes, I remembered that; I made *that* my motto. But I forgot, I would not remember, that it is also written, 'love mercy.' How much unhappiness I might have prevented if I had remembered that."

"You judge yourself too harshly, sir," I said in reply.

"I have shut out sympathy," he goes on, without heeding my words; "and I should have spurned it if offered, and yet my life has not been happy."

I know this. I have witnessed some of its unhappiness. Thus I think, but do not speak.

"Neither happy nor useful. I have lived to myself and within myself too much, too much, Sidney. The struggles of my early life, to avoid bankruptcy, to rise out of the poverty which no one knew but myself, which no one guessed at—it may be that these struggles hardened me, and made me severe in judging those whose strength gave way under similar trials; I think it must have been so, though

it ought not to have been. And the sacrifices I was compelled to make, may have soured me against those who knew but little what it is to sacrifice love and hope on the altar of duty. But it ought not to have been so. It was sinful. And when I was pluming myself—and decking myself out to my foolish imagination in fancied virtues—and saying with the proud Pharisee, 'I thank thee that I am not as other men,' I should have taken the poor publican's stand, and put up his petition,—'God be merciful to me a sinner!'"

I understand what that aged, bowed man means, and I say so, striving to stay the current of his self-accusations. But he goes on,—

"And the wealth that came to me later,—the prosperity which God has given me,—how have I used it?"

"You condemn yourself unjustly, my dear Uncle," I say, soothingly; but Uncle Ezekiel (for his is the shadow) takes no heed of my remonstrance.

"I thank God that now it can be used worthily. It is yours, Sidney: you know better how to use it than I." And so, with a few more words, the shadow vanishes, and I am alone.

Yes, I understand all Uncle Ezekiel has said, and much that he has left unsaid. I know that when he was—years and years ago—before I was

born—accounted harsh, and unbending, and unjust.

But I must not dwell upon this. A journey is before me; and while I hurriedly prepare for it, I overhear myself repeating words which involuntarily fall from my lips,—"'Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then, face to face: now we know in part; but then shall we know even as also we are known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity; but the greatest of these is charity.'"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST HOURS OF AN EVENTFUL EVENING.

With a heart lighter than that of my companion, I started on the journey towards Greenhurst. The means were in my power, of repaying, in some slight measure, my early protectresses and best friends the substantial love and kindness they had shown, the sacrifices they had made. I could only guess at the extent of the misfortune which had suddenly befallen them, it is true; and I might not be able to meet *that* in full; but I could, at least,

ensure to them, for the remainder of their lives, the comforts and moderate luxuries to which they had been accustomed. As to Fenwick Ross, I had no great fears on his account. Certainly he had become all at once poor, and would be cast on his own exertions, while Florence's prospective fortune was, most likely, utterly lost. But then I knew also that Fenwick would not sink under the burden. He was rising in his profession, and a few years of hard struggling would not hurt him. Hurt him! it would do him good.

I said all this to Mr. Tibletts, and soon succeeded in raising him to a more comfortable state of mind; for, to do him justice, he thought little of his own share in the disaster. He wasn't an old man yet, not he, he said (Mr. Tibletts was not far short of seventy), and he could beat younger men out of the field, if it came to be tried, and tried it should be. He could live on a hundred a year, if it came to that; and if he could not take to his old practice at Greenhurst again,—which, however, he thought he could,—why, he could go somewhere else: and if he had to work hard, it would be a wonder if he did not get rid of the gout, and bearing that was the hardest work he had ever gone through.

Our journey was not a very unpleasant one, therefore; and when, late in the afternoon, we ar-

rived at Greenhurst, the barometer of Mr. Tibletts' mind had risen to "set fair."

I wish I could present to my readers, a vivid picture of my three aunts on that eventful evening, when we were all gathered round a cheerful fire in their snug drawing-room. It was cold, raw November weather without; but all was warmth and heart sunshine within. There was Aunt Elizabeth in her gray silk gown, tall and stately, with not a wrinkle on her forehead, though she certainly was not younger than her life-long admirer, Mr. Tibletts. And she had so far the advantage of her younger sisters, that she had no need to wear spectacles; her eyes were as bright, and her sight was as keen, as they had been any time within the last thirty years. There was Aunt Martha, shorter in stature and fuller proportioned than her elder sister, with a skin so clear and transparent that the faintest blush (and she did sometimes blush) was visible on her cheeks in what some poet has phrased "a heavenly red." A fine-looking sexagenarian was Aunt Martha; and the brilliantly white teeth, in unbroken rank, and every one of them perfect, which you could not help noticing and admiring when she opened her lips to speak or to smile, set off her happy round face to advantage, and made her look ten years younger than she really was, in spite of her white hair in little modest curls spread on each

side of her face, and her silver-mounted spectacles. And there was Aunt Mary, with her beaming countenance and her pleasant musical voice, which always fell kindlily on the ear, though it sometimes *could* tell unwelcome truths if its owner were so minded. In virtue of her comparative juvenility (for Aunt Mary was younger by some years than Aunt Martha), she dressed usually in gayer colours, and followed more modern fashions, than her sisters. And, this evening, as though to throw the gauntlet down to fate and fortune, she had put on the prettiest costume imaginable.

But what I should like you to see with your mind's eye, gentle reader, is the placid, peaceful, happy expression which had settled on the countenances of my three aunts,—had so long settled there that it was not in the power of earthly chances and changes to banish it for long. It was such an expression as could only be produced by an habitual trust in God, and an earnest, child-like obedience to His authority; just such an expression as the inspired prophet might have contemplated, when he said, "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quiet and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places, when it shall hail, coming down on the forest, and the city shall be low in a low place."

"Did you ever see anything like 'em, now, Sid?" whispered the admiring Mr. Tibletts aside to me, soon after we had entered, and before we had settled down to serious conference. "If you and I didn't know better, we might suppose they had just had a fortune left them, instead of being on the brink of losing one."

* * * * *

"It was very good of you to come down, Sidney," said Aunt Elizabeth, before I had had time to open my budget. "We were never more glad to see you than we are now—not even when you came home after your long absence; were we, my dears?"

"Never," said Aunt Martha and Aunt Mary, both together.

"Because you can help us talk over our plans, you know; and perhaps we shall be glad of your assistance, too, in carrying them out."

"You may reckon on that, Aunt Elizabeth; but perhaps, first of all, you will hear what I have to say?"

"No, no, Sid; let your aunts say their say first—that's only politeness," interposed Mr. Tibletts, who perhaps was curious to know what plans his "three Graces" could possibly have laid, without his advice and concurrence.

"I think it will be best, Sidney," said Aunt

Elizabeth, mildly; "for we should like to get these matters off our minds at once. I need not say that they have disturbed us a little."

"Not a bit, that I can see, Miss Lawson. I wish they had. If you could but have got up a good hurricane, it would have been some comfort to me; but there's no moving one of you."

"Nonsense, Mr. Tibletts," said Aunt Mary.

"We *have* been disturbed, however," continued Aunt Elizabeth, "though not to the extent of our good friend's wishes, and why he should wish it I cannot imagine; but that little ruffle is passed by, I trust, and now all we have to do is to meet our altered circumstances and prepare for the future without murmuring. We have had a long time of ease and prosperity, Sidney," my aunt went on; "and if we have to enter on other courses now, our times are in better hands than our own."

"Yes, but, Aunt Elizabeth," I began; but Mr. Tibletts would not let me complete my sentence.

"Hear what your aunts have got to say, Sid.," he growled.

"It will be a sore trial to us all—of course it will," continued Aunt Elizabeth; "we, who have lived together all our lives long, and never had any real differences in thought, or feeling, or wishes ——." My dear aunt's voice softened and trem-

bled a little when she came to this point, while Aunt Martha took off her spectacles and began wiping them, and Aunt Mary heaved a gentle sigh; but Aunt Elizabeth soon regained her composed, firm tone. "Yes, it will be a trial; but the time of parting must have come some day, and soon; a more sorrowful parting than this will be——"

"Miss Lawson!" broke in Mr. Tibletts, staring wildly at the speaker, and then rolling his eyes as wildly from sister to sister, in evident confusion and conglomeration of ideas, "Miss Martha, Miss Mary, be kind enough to tell me—I want to know where I am, Sid. Did ever anybody hear the like? Parting, too! They talk of parting! Do you hear, Sid.?"

"Our first thought," resumed Aunt Elizabeth, without heeding Mr. Tibletts' ejaculations and exclamations, "was to dispose of our cottage——"

"Dispose of Virginia Cottage, too! Do you hear that, Sid.?" This was whispered to me in an aside.

"To dispose of our cottage, and sink the remnant of the wealth which God has so long permitted us to use and enjoy, in a joint life annuity. But we found that this was not practicable."

"And you never said a word to me about it, Miss Lawson! You wouldn't ask my advice! But I deserve it. If you hadn't taken my advice

—yes, you have done that once too often;" and Mr. Tibletts groaned with self-reproach.

"Don't say that, Mr. Tibletts," interposed Aunt Mary, with evident strong commiseration. "We have always valued your advice, and always shall value it. We should not have taken such a step without knowing your views first; and we shall want you now to give us your opinion on our present plans."

Mr. Tibletts brightened up at this.

"Well," continued Aunt Elizabeth, "we found that our first scheme would not do. And therefore it seems to come to this. Our dear Martha has been our housekeeper, you know, all the years we have lived together; and what she has done so well—dear Martha, please not to interrupt me—done so well for us, she will be able, with God's blessing, to do for another. Sidney, sit down my dear, and pray don't speak yet; let me finish what I have to say," pleaded Aunt Elizabeth, when she saw me start to my feet in utter consternation. "There are such positions to be obtained, you know," Aunt Elizabeth went on; "and though it will be a trial for us to part——"

"Aunt, dear aunt, I cannot——" But Aunt Martha laid her hand on my shoulder, and whispered patience into my ear, and I was silenced.

"As to myself," Aunt Elizabeth went on, "I

know I have fewer talents for usefulness than either of my dear sisters; but I hope I shall not be utterly powerless: and if dear Mary can obtain a few pupils,—which we have reason to believe she may; and you know, Sidney, what a teacher your Aunt Mary is, and how well she educated dear Florence——"

It was of no use. There are bounds to all things; and if Mr. Tibletts had not spoken then, he must have been choked with hysteric passion. Out it came, therefore.

"So this is your scheme, Miss Lawson? And you think, Miss Lawson, that—that Sidney is such a brute, -- that Fenwick Ross is such a mean-spirited rascal,—that I, your old friend, am such a double-dyed scoundrel, as to suffer—to permit—to countenance—all this intolerable nonsense?" The words broke out in successive explosions, like great guns firing; and our poor friend literally foamed at the mouth. "And so, Miss Martha, you are to go out to service, are you? And you, Miss Mary, are going to keep a school for little girls?" The force of scorn could get no further.

"Why not, Mr. Tibletts?" asked Aunt Mary, mildly.

"Hear her, Sid.! she says, 'why not?' Why not! Tell her why not, Sid. It is your turn to speak now."

And I did speak. I told my aunts, as well as tears—yes, I did cry, and I am not ashamed to own it,—as well as tears would let me, all that my Uncle Ezekiel had said and done. I laid his fortune (not mine, for I had none to lay) at their feet. I entreated, I implored, I begged that, at least, they would take time to consider. I knew well the reluctance they might perhaps naturally feel to receiving favours from *his* hands; but I attempted to show that only in this way could they practise the Christian duty of forgiveness—full forgiveness and obliteration of the past—towards one whom they thought had done them wrong.

I think I should have prevailed. I knew that there was a struggle, that there must be; but I saw, as I looked from aunt to aunt, meltings of heart in each dear countenance. Yes, it was hard, I can quite believe it was hard, even for them, so to forgive as to receive such kindness and help in need, and generous self-abnegation, from one whose name they had ever associated with the darkest, dreariest passage in the history of their lives. But I saw they were relenting, when—a sharp ringing at the bell below, and then hasty, quick steps in the hall, interrupted the conference. There was scarcely time for us to assume a composure we did not feel (as to Mr. Tibletts, he could not assume it, but retreated behind a tall

screen to wipe his eyes), when the drawing-room door opened, and in sprang—Fenwick Ross.

CHAPTER XII.

A SHADOW IN THE CHURCHYARD.

"Fenwick! my dear fellow!

"Ah, I thought I should astonish you," he said, with a laugh which jarred unpleasantly on all our nerves at that moment. "I knew you were here, for in coming through London, I called at —— Lane, and found you had flown, an hour before, with a companion whom I guessed was Mr. Tibletts."

"You guessed right," said that gentleman, emerging from his retreat, and shaking hands with young Ross; "and here I am, you see."

"Ah! I might be sure you were not far off. Well, I had a companion too——"

"Not Florence? not dear Florence?" cried my aunts.

"No, not Florence;—dear Flo. does not even know where I am; for I had no time to go to —— Square, and I could not have written to her

without alarming her. No; my companion happens to be a gentleman."

"Where is he, Fenwick?" Aunt Martha wanted to know. "You have not hesitated to——"

"No, no; I should have claimed your hospitality for my friend, if it had been needed; but it was desirable I should take him at once to our place."

"What! have you been to Ross Place, then?"

"Just come from there, Sidney. I did not stay very long; I just deposited my friend with my father, took refreshments, and had half an hour's chat, then came off here in a trot."

"And how is your father, Fenwick? how are they all at Ross Place?" Aunt Elizabeth asked. You should have heard her ask that question, reader. It would have done you good. There was no rancour in her mind against the man who had dissipated her and her sisters' fortunes. You would have been convinced of that.

"Oh, they are all well: a little cut up, you know, as I expected to find them; but it will all come right again now."

"I don't understand you, Fenwick," I said.

"How should you, when you don't let me tell a straightforward story?" he asked. "Your questions put me out. Where was I? — ah, I remember now. Well, we called on you at —— Lane,

found you had an hour's start of us,—wasted another hour in getting a chaise to follow you; tried to catch you, but couldn't, of course, though we were not many minutes behind you at last. However, seeing it was so, and time being precious, we (that is, my travelling companion and I) drove on to the place; and—here I am."

"But I thought you were in the West of England."

"So I was when the news reached me, in a letter from my father; but of course I could not remain there after that."

"Well; and what do you think of it? You said something, a minute or two ago, about its all coming right again."

"Yes; so it will, I am in good hope. I see the way pretty clearly. I have had a brief explanation with my father; and I see enough to know that his immediate pressure arises from that architect, whom I always suspected to be a rogue, and am sure of it now,—and also that *his* proceedings can very soon be put a stop to."

"You have made good use of your time, Fenwick."

"Why yes; but it does not take long to master some cases, and this is one of that sort."

"I am glad there is any hope," said I; "but still, from what Mr. Tibletts tells me——"

"Mr. Tibletts has been frightening himself; but he has done it in company. My father has been frightening himself still more; and the fright has spread, naturally; and, as naturally, has produced the very evils they dreaded. Mists and shadows they were in the first place; but they have partly grown into substance now."

"Only partly."

"No, only partly. It is only to apply the right dissolvent, and they will vanish again."

"And that dissolvent is——"

"Money."

"Ah! I thought so."

"Throwing good money after bad," said Mr. Tibletts, in one of his deepest growls.

"Mr. Tibletts, you are—a very excellent gentleman; but please not to interpose your ill omens. I told you just now that you have been unnecessarily frightened. A certain article in a certain medical journal has given *you* the alarm."

"Dr. Lyncham wrote it," said Mr. Tibletts, submissively.

"I don't care if twenty Dr. Lynchams wrote it. I have known books cried down in reviews by blockheads who had never read them, but I don't know that any harm came of it in the long run."

"But, not to interrupt you, Fenwick,—what are your grounds for hoping——"

"That my father's speculation will turn out well in the end? you would say. It would take too long time to tell you now, Sidney; so you must believe me when I say that there is no reasonable doubt of it."

"Well, I must say again that you have made good use of your time."

"Yes, perhaps; but I do not say that this knowledge has come to me in the last hour. But what I want with you now is to go with me at once to the place. For as you have shown no curiosity to know who the friend is I have brought down, I must tell you that he is a friend of yours also. I wanted him to come here with me, but he would not. He would take a walk, he said, till my return."

"A friend of mine, Fenwick?"

"Yes, Mr. Coverley; you know him, and he knows you."

[I must explain here, before I carry my narrative any farther, that I had during the last three years received one or two short notes from my former fellow-passenger; but that we had never met since our landing. Twice, when in London, he had called at the counting-house in —— Lane; but on both occasions I was out of town. He had also invited me to visit him at his estate in Devonshire; but circumstances had prevented my

acceptance of the invitation. In short, like many friendships which are formed as we pass through life, this, though warm and reciprocal, had seemed likely to terminate where it began. I should have mentioned this before, if I had thought of it.]

"Mr. Coverley! and do you know him, then, Fenwick?"

"Yes; but my acquaintance with him is only of recent date. It happens that I have been engaged as counsel in a cause relating to Mr. Coverley's title to certain property in Cornwall; and, contrary to expectation, and to precedent also, you will say, quick work was made of it. His title, in fact, was triumphantly established. Well, this brought us into personal intercourse; and the other day he called on me at my lodgings in Exeter, just after I had received my father's communication. Of course, he could see there was something the matter. The truth is, I was so knocked down with the intelligence that, for a few hours, I was quite ill. Well, Mr. Coverley saw that something was wrong; and, to make few words of it, I soon told him what it was. And directly he heard me talk about Greenhurst, he was all ears, as we say. I used to know something about Greenhurst," he said, with a sigh. "A dear friend of mine once lived there." And when I had finished, and told him that I must post off directly, he offered to

accompany me. More than this, Sidney, he has opened his purse to me; and a heavy one it is, I can tell you. Of course, I refused this at first, but he would not hear of it. 'You must let me have my way. You have saved me some thousands that might have been spent in litigation, besides the anxiety connected with it,' he said, and I believe he was right there; 'and the least I can do is to help you out of this trouble, if I can. And besides,' added he, 'I have a sort of yearning affection for Greenhurst;' and, in short, Sidney, he talked me *over* to his whim: and here I am, with *carte blanche* to do what I like."

"And there is something else I should say," continued Fenwick, after a moment's pause, "because that is the key to Mr. Coverley's generosity. I had heard you speak of *your* Mr. Coverley, of course, Sidney; and it was natural I should wish to know if your and my Mr. Coverley were the same; so I introduced your name. That was enough; and, I promise you, he was surprised to find that you and I were so nearly related; for I told him we were almost brothers. I rather think he understood this literally, and I have not had time to explain everything yet."

It is astonishing how rapidly time flies when the mind is deeply engrossed. The conversation with my aunts, before Fenwick made his appear-

ance, seemed to have occupied but a few minutes; and Fenwick's narrative and explanations had been so rapid and eager that I could have fancied he had entered only five minutes before; but when I looked at my watch I found it was already past ten.

And still there were many questions I wished to put to Fenwick. For one thing, I could not clearly see the strong grounds for his assurance that his father's embarrassments could be overcome. But that which puzzled me most was Mr. Coverley's avowed former connexion with Greenhurst. Was it possible.—No, that could not be. But a dear friend of his had once lived at Greenhurst. That dear friend might possibly have been Captain Warren; and Mr. Coverley might have been the writer of that letter which fell into Mrs. Slokum's hands. It was strange that Fenwick, with all his legal acumen, had not thought of this; but it was plain that he had not. His mind was probably so taken up with his father's affairs that this obvious conclusion had escaped his notice. I looked at my aunts; but I could read in their countenances that Fenwick's story had only bewildered them for the time, and they had no more than a confused idea that some strange turn in the position of affairs was approaching.

Not so Mr. Tibletts, however. One glance at

him convinced me that he was undergoing some extraordinary mental conflict. His countenance was flushed and agitated, and he sat restlessly in his chair, with his hands tightly clasped together. I was about to speak, when Fenwick laid his hand on my shoulder.

"I did not know it was so late," he said; "and I scarcely like to press you to accompany me to-night; but I have a great deal to do to-morrow."

"I'll go with you. My aunts will excuse me, I know; and if Mr. Tibletts will be kind enough to remain with them till I return," I said, rising.

"I must go with you. Our good friends here are not afraid of ghosts. Mr. Ross wont mind having another companion," said the ex-apothecary, springing from his seat.

"I shall be only too happy," replied Fenwick. "Besides, you are as much interested in these affairs as any of us, Mr. Tibletts; so come, by all means." In another minute the door was closed behind us, and we were walking rapidly through the silent, deserted village street.

"What do you——" I began to say in a whisper to Mr. Tibletts, as he took my arm.

"Don't speak; don't ask me!" said he, nervously interrupting me. "I don't know yet; I

cannot say; I know nothing." So we went on in silence.

I have said that, earlier in the evening, it was dark and dismal; but at this time, the clouds had partially cleared, so that a few stars peeped out from the sky. The moon, too, not yet in its fourth quarter, was just risen, and our shadows were cast before us in preposterous length, as we proceeded on our course.

We arrived at the churchyard, through which there was a public path, cutting off a considerable angle of the road we had to take; and my hand was on the latch of the swing-gate which would have admitted us within the precincts of the dead, when I felt my arm clutched by Mr. Tibletts who gasped a few incoherent words and pointed to the white walls of the church, which stood out prominently in the now unclouded moonlight.

It was singular, certainly. On that white wall was cast a tall shadow, in the form of humanity, and motionless, for the time, as a statue. The head was bare, and the profile of a countenance was distinctly visible, though distorted by the inequalities of the surface on which it was cast. The body was wrapped in a cloak, apparently reaching to the ground, so that no limbs were visible.

"The ghost that Mrs. Slokam saw!" whispered

the ex-apothecary, tremulously; and (but perhaps it was the reflection of the pale moonlight) his countenance, as I caught a glimpse of it, was ghastly.

As for myself, I have no hesitation in acknowledging that I was sufficiently startled; not so much, I believe, by seeing a shadow on a church wall, as by its curious coincidence with the thoughts which had just before agitated my mind. Under the influence of these feelings, I laid my hand on Fenwick's arm, who had begun to wonder what had brought us to a stand; and then, pointing to the shadow, I whispered, "Be silent," in his ear.

It was scarcely a minute, probably, that we stood thus entranced. Then the shadow moved; we saw a shadowy arm raised, then a shadowy hat was placed on the shadowy head; and then the shadow glided slowly along the white wall and disappeared.

We were no longer spell-bound; in another moment we were in the churchyard; and we saw the dim outlines of a human form approaching towards us, with quiet footsteps. It came from the part of the ground in which Florence's mother lay buried. For one moment the form hesitated, when, as I suppose, it became conscious of our presence; but it was too late then for con-

cealment or flight, and it came on slowly, nearer and nearer. At last we met. The moonlight was strong and bright on the countenance of the shadow's substance, and on it were traces of deep emotion. He raised his hat courteously as we were passing; and—

"CAPTAIN WARREN, by all that is marvellous!" shouted Mr. Tibletts, valorously blocking up the path with his stout frame, and opposing his outspread hands and outstretched arms to the further progress of the wanderer among the graves.

"MR. COVERLEY!" I exclaimed, and sprang forwards to clasp his hand in friendship.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRIGHT AT LAST.

A MONTH had passed away, and I was again at Greenhurst. It was Christmas-eve, and the drawing-room of Virginia Cottage, decked out in gay winter plumage, and lighted up with I know not how many wax candles, to say nothing of a blazing fire in the capacious hearth, presented a scene of unusual life and interest. There was Aunt Eliza-

beth, queen-like in her simplicity, as she bent courteously from guest to guest, and paid that due regard to each which leaves no room for jealousy in the humblest, or scorn in the highest. There was Aunt Martha, the housekeeper that was to have been, the housekeeper that was, released for the time from those subsidiary joys and cares, and devoting her attention to Uncle Ezekiel, who had been persuaded to pay another and a more genial visit to the house in which, more than twenty years before, he had been an undesired guest. He was shrunken, and withered, and feeble; but a softer expression beamed in his countenance than of yore. There was Aunt Mary, with the little Florence of two years old on her knee, possibly calling back in her thoughts those earlier days of this history, in which *our* little baby Florence had found a quiet, safe resting-place there.

And our Florence was present also,—be sure that where the child is the mother will be, if she can; and Fenwick was by her side; but her attention was divided now, and not even a husband's attractions could detach her from the newly found father, who, pale and shaken with recent mental conflicts, bent towards her with unutterable tenderness and love. Of all those present, no one was happier than Florence.

There, also, was Fenwick's father, subdued in

demeanour, but not the less genial and hearty for that; and near him were his wife and daughter: the first of these, a lady of elegant manners and delicate health; the second, a sister in every way worthy of Fenwick Rees; and this, you know, reader, is saying a good deal. As I have not had occasion, however, to introduce these ladies very prominently into my history, this short notice must suffice here.

You may rest assured that Mr. Tibletts was not absent. "He is just the same as one of us, you know," said Aunt Martha, when the preliminaries of the intended party were discussed in conclave, "and we should never think of having a family meeting without him, especially on so joyful an occasion."

"I am not sure about that," responded Aunt Mary, reddening; "I sometimes think that Mr. Tibletts is rather too much one of the family."

"Or too little, aunt," I whispered in her ear, rather maliciously; but the arrow glanced off without inflicting a wound. Aunt Mary was certainly charmingly simple.

"Mr. Tibletts must be invited, of course," said Aunt Elizabeth; "considering the interest he has always shown with regard to darling Florence, and his knowledge of the circumstances which brought the dear child into connexion with us in her earliest

infancy, it would be improper in the last degree for him to be absent."

So Mr. Tibletts was there, resplendent. He had gallantly attached himself to Mrs. Ross, and was in an animated discussion respecting the superior virtue of a newly discovered palliative for the tic douloureux, to which that good lady was subject, when the conversation all round gradually flagged as by mutual consent, and then merged into silence, deep and profound, as Mr. Coverley rose and looked around on all present, and then once more, as by irresistible fascination, fixed his over-full eyes on "our Florence," still retaining in his grasp her trembling hand. She had, almost involuntarily, risen with him; and there, for a brief space, they stood, almost facing each other, stirring up the depths of each other's soul with their liquid, piercing glances of love, till nature could bear no further restraint. To use the expressive language of Scripture, they fell upon each other's necks and wept; but not bitterly; no, not bitterly.

There were not many dry eyes then, I promise you, gentle reader; we all cried for sympathy; and before the unbidden but unchecked tears had been wiped away, the firmness of the father had, in some measure, returned; and, relinquishing his daughter's hand, he spoke, with agitation at first, but his voice gained strength as he proceeded.

"My best and most grateful thanks are due to you all, dear friends," he said, "for the forbearance I have received on all hands since I came among you, and for the kindness with which you have waited for those explanations which are due to you all; but more than all due to these almost angelic beings,—or rather let me say these truly Christian ladies to whose disinterested—"

There was a slight stir here. Mr. Tibletts, for instance, could not refrain from thrusting in a gruff interjectionary "Hear, hear!" and Aunt Elizabeth, gently laying her hand on Mr. Coverley's arm, looked so entreatingly into his face, that he discontinued that topic.

"The time is come, however," Mr. Coverley went on, "for those explanations to be given. They will be short, but I trust not unsatisfactory. At the same time, I hold myself in readiness to answer any questions which my friends around me may ask. Let me add that the kindness of one here present, in furnishing me with the history of events which bear somewhat painfully on my own brief narrative, but of which I should otherwise have been ignorant, relieve me from the necessity of asking for counter-explanations now.

"There are three particulars," continued Mr. Coverley, after a short pause, during which he seemed to be mustering up his mental strength and

determination, "which especially demand the utmost candour on my part. The first of these relates to my marriage with—with the gentle, loving—with the mother of this dear child, whom God in his mercy has restored to me. The second particular relates to my change of name, the cause of some unhappiness, which might otherwise have been avoided. The third relates to my subsequent abandonment of my dear child to the benevolence of strangers."

"Yes, yes; let him clear up that," whispered Mr. Tibletts to me. He had slipped round to where I was sitting, and was leaning over the back of my chair. "Let him clear that up, and—" I did not hear the rest of the whisper, for Mr. Coverley was again speaking.

"I was the younger of two brothers, and at an early age I entered the army, though I never attained the rank in it to which the good people of Greenhurst promoted me. They chose to call me 'Captain,' and it suited my purpose of concealment at that time to permit the mistake to remain uncorrected.

"It was while residing in country quarters that I became strongly attached to a young lady of unblemished character, and many excellent virtues; but she was of lower birth than my own; she was also an orphan and a poor dependant,—a gover-

ness, in fact, in a family I often visited. I will not dwell on the accident which led to our intimacy, nor on its after-progress. It is enough to say that, to rescue my Florence from poverty, after she was unjustly and cruelly dismissed from her situation, I persuaded her to a secret marriage.

"The marriage did not long remain secret. My father heard of it, and he disowned me. My mother was not living, or she might have softened his heart.

"It was soon after this, and to avoid the heartless jests of my brother officers, that I obtained leave of absence, and, by accident rather than by design, found a temporary home for my young wife and myself in this village; one great recommendation of the place being that I was entirely unknown; but to avoid any remote chance of being recognised, I renounced my own name, even as I had been renounced, and took that of my Florence. One person only was privy to our secret; this person was my commanding officer, who had in other ways befriended me."

Mr. Coverley stopped here, and drew from his pocket-book a document, which he handed to Fenwick Ross. "It is the certificate of my marriage with Florence Warren," he said, quietly; and then he added, "Is there any question which any dear friend would like to put to me here?"

We were all silent, and Mr. Coverley proceeded.

"The circumstances under which I left Greenhurst, and which compelled me, against my wishes, to leave my Florence behind me, are sufficiently understood by you all; but you can none of you easily realize the wretchedness into which I was plunged by the hurried and unexpected recall to my regiment. Then, for the first time, I foresaw what miserable results might accrue from the imprudence of which I had been guilty. But I will not dwell upon this; it is enough to say that the order was imperative, and that I endeavoured to make—or rather that I bade farewell to my poor young wife intending to make—such arrangements as were in my power for her support and comfort. I knew, too well, that to myself alone could she look for this.

"You all have been made aware," Mr. Coverley went on, "of the accident which frustrated all my hopes and plans, and laid me on a bed of suffering from which I did not rise until months had passed away. My removal from the scene of my accident was due to the kind offices of the friend I have already mentioned, who found me out in the roadside cottage to which I had been conveyed, and removed me to London; and it was from him I afterwards heard of the death of my poor Florence."

"Not to interrupt you unnecessarily, sir," interposed Mr. Tibletts; "it was this friend, I presume, who wrote to—"

"To Florence, yes; and it was his generosity which furnished the means of providing for her immediate comfort, as I hoped. That friend soon afterwards left England, and he never returned. He was killed in battle.

"I have not much more tell," continued Mr. Coverley. "After many months' suffering, I was sufficiently recovered to return to my father's house; for when he knew that my poor wife was dead, I received his forgiveness. I could not remain at home, however; my heart was too full of sorrow to endure inaction; and as my return to a military life was utterly impossible, I sought and obtained employment in India, where the greater part of my life has since then been passed, and where I should probably have remained to this day, but for the death of my elder brother, who died childless, leaving me his heir."

Once more Mr. Coverley paused, but seeing that his audience evidently desired to hear more, he proceeded—

"It only remains for me to account for my apparent neglect of this dear child. Believe me, it was not wilful. She knows this; and now the time is come for me openly to declare that, until

the evening of that eventful day which brought me back to my Florence's last resting-place, I never knew that I was, or had ever been, a father. I left England in ignorance of this. See, friends, the cause and the proof of my ignorance," and once more lifting and unclasping the pocket-book which lay before on the table, Mr. Coverley drew forth a small scrap of a newspaper, yellow with age, and passed it round. It was a list of deaths; and among them, this—

"Dec. —th, at Greenhurst, in ——, Florence, the wife of Captain Warren, after a few hours' illness, aggravated by anxiety."

"I am ignorant, to this day," continued Mr. Coverley, "by whom this sorrowful announcement was made public—"

"It was my doing, that was," said Mr. Tibletts, hastily; "and, by all that's innocent, I never once thought of the baby when I wrote it and sent it to the newspaper. If I had—"

"If you had, sir, my own course, and that of my child might have been very differently ordered; but I can scarcely bring myself now to regret the chance which has been overruled so graciously."

"You never would have had the heart to rob us of our darling baby, Florence," cried Aunt Elizabeth, nervously.

"I am afr[illegible] should h[illegible]ne so, Miss Law-

son," replied Mr. Coverley, with a smile; "and in doing this, I am sure I should have inflicted an injury on her which no love of mine could have repaired."

"But, excuse me, my dear sir," said Mr. Tibletts; "did you never make any further inquiries? That scrap of news was a poor thing to go upon, was it not?"

"You are right, Mr. Tibletts; but that paper fell into my hands when I was incapable of acting for myself; and the shock it occasioned brought on a return of fever, which nearly proved fatal. But I did make further inquiries; that is, as soon as I was able, and permitted to direct my own motions, I came myself to Greenhurst."

Mr. Tibletts gave an involuntary start, and so did I. "Did you ever hear the like, Sid.?" he whispered; "it was no ghost of Mrs. Slokum's drunken fancy that she saw, then, after all."

"I came at night," Mr. Coverley went on; "for I dared not look on the scene of my lost happiness in the glare of day. The carriage in which I travelled was left at the outskirts of the village, and I proceeded alone to the cottage where we had lodged—"

"And the woman was drunk; that abominable old Slokum!" exclaimed Mr. Tibletts, aloud, thereby

greatly scandalising Aunt Mary, who held up her finger reprovingly, and said in a low tone—

"For shame, Mr. Tibletts!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mary; it was involuntary," pleaded the abashed gentleman, blushing to the tips of his ears.

"It may be that the woman was intoxicated; but she took me to the churchyard, and showed me my poor Florence's grave; and why she should not have told me that I had a living infant, I cannot even now comprehend."

"I can, though," growled the ex-apothecary, drily; "cannot you, Sid.?" And then he added, addressing Florence's father, "If you had only come to me, Mr. Coverley, instead of to that—that wretched woman!"

"I had the greatest reason for avoiding you then, or thought I had. I know now how unjust my thoughts of you were. But I laid the death of my Florence at your door. I believed that if you had not neglected her—you remember, my dear sir, how I had placed her in your charge—and I—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Mr. Tibletts; "when our patients recover, it is their good constitution, or some other nonsense; but when they die, they die of the doctor." This, however, was said in Aunt Mary's ear; not in mine, nor yet aloud.

"And now, dear friends," added Mr. Coverley, "my explanations are ended; and, once more, I thank you for the indulgence I have received at your hands. The kindness shown to my motherless child by one and all of you, can never be repaid. To you, Miss Lawson, and to—"

"Sidney, my dear, said Aunt Elizabeth, hastily, and in an agitated voice, "you must, if you please, put an end to this. It is too personal, you know; and too, too painful—too trying, at least, to our feelings. Not but what we all feel very happy, I am sure; for this is a joyful occasion altogether; but you promised we should be spared—"

"And so you shall be, aunt. These explanations were necessary, you know; and, to some extent, they have been a little, shall I say, mournful?"

"No, not mournful, Sidney, but touching."

"A little touching, then; but now they are all over, we will—put an end to it, as you say."

"Only one word more, dear friends," continued Mr. Coverley, who had waited while this by-play between Aunt Elizabeth and myself was going on, and who, I think, understood its import. "That the painful events in my history have been so overruled for good, and have been brought thus far to this happy conclusion, is owing to a Power and Wisdom above our comprehension,

indeed, but not above our faith and love; but it offers no excuse for errors committed. Right actions may be wrongly performed. The deceit and concealment which I practised towards my father closed his heart against me, and changed the course of more lives than my own. The fountain was poisoned, what wonder that some of its streams have been bitter! I thank God, only some of them."

"You are right, sir," said my Uncle Ezekiel, rising as Mr. Coverley sat down, and speaking tremulously, and yet with dignity and self-command; "you are quite correct, sir. Right actions may be wrongly performed. Surely I, too, have known this. But then," and here he hesitated and seemed dubious and bewildered, "but then, can they be right actions? I do not know."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Tibletts, bustling in cheerfully, "pardon me, Mr. Bell; pardon me, Mr. Coverley; but isn't it the motive? I think it must be the motive that makes the difference. I may cure a man of a fever: well, that's good, you'll say. But I may cure him by giving him stuff that ought to have poisoned him outright; well, that isn't good, and it makes the other scale kick the beam; but then, what do I do it for? If my motive is a bad one, a mercenary one, an experimental one—scientific, you understand, to see if

the poor wretch can be cured with poison, why that's the very—excuse me, ladies—the very old Harry. But if my motive is a good one in the main, and I mean honestly to cure the patient, and think I take the best means of doing it, eh? That restores the balance, I think, and makes the thing right after all. Miss Lawson, I appeal to you—you know more than most persons I ever met with—tell me whether you don't think as I do?"

It happens that I am unable to give Aunt Elizabeth's decision on this question; for Fenwick, who had by this time relieved Aunt Mary of her burden, by taking little Florence on to his own knee, being tickled by the case thus put, suddenly burst out into a loud "Bravo, Mr. Tibletts!" which so alarmed the child, that she cried out lustily, and, after various unsuccessful attempts at pacification, she had to be taken from the drawing-room.

This caused a diversion; and Mr. Coverley's explanations being considered not only tolerably satisfactory, but interesting, no further questions were asked, and the conversation was drawn off into other channels. At first, indeed, it kept on its course in one broad stream, but presently it ramified into various streamlets; Mr. Ross and Mr. Tibletts, for instance, laying their heads together in consultation, the particulars of which

I am not able to record, but it related to the resuscitation of their hopes, which had almost been buried beneath the loads of brick and mortar at Ross Town, interspersed, on the part of the ex-apothecary, with contemptuous allusions to "that Dr. Lyncham." Meanwhile, Mr. Coverley had almost monopolised Aunt Mary; and I could see, though I could not hear, that the conversation must have related to "our darling Florence," who had not yet returned from her maternal duties. Aunt Martha had also disappeared, to direct and superintend, as I rightly judged, the serving up of the extraordinary supper (for those were days in which suppers were eaten), to which we afterwards sat down in the dining-room. At the same time, Aunt Elizabeth had shifted her position close to Mrs. Ross, and these two ladies were deep in a discussion, of which, I am grieved to say, I can give no account, for they spoke very low. I only guessed that it referred to an expected interesting event in the history of our united families; and this suspicion was confirmed when, three months afterwards, I had to offer congratulations on the entrance into the world of a baby Fenwick—but that is neither here nor there.

It is said that listeners never hear any good of themselves. It happened that, being the only disengaged person in the room, I thought no harm

in sauntering to a small sofa, to which Fenwick and his sister had withdrawn. They did not notice my approach, and, as plainly as ears could hear, I heard Fenwick say—

"But is n't it a pity now, Edith? Positively his life will be wasted; and I do believe it will be half your fault. The dear fellow would make" (here I lost a few words); "and, in short, if you would only take compassion on him."

"I admit all you say, Fenwick," I heard in reply, "but—but if there is anything I do dislike in a man, it is ——"

Gentle reader, shall I reveal the secret, and confess the nature of a disqualification which clearly pointed to my unhappy self? Nay, rather let it remain a mystery for ever. But, whatever it was, I heard no more; I never *could* have had courage after that; and I am an old bachelor.

And now, for the last time in writing these pages, mists and shadows rise and fall before me; and in this mirror of the past I see one after another of my old companions and friends retire from the scene, till but two or three remain. I see others rising to take their place, and for those

who are gone I sorrow not as those who have no hope. And on this bright Christmas morning, as I pen these last words, with a little Florence (the fourth of that line) standing by my side, having called to tell me that Grandpapa and Grandmama Ross—the Fenwick and Florence of my history—are to be at the dinner party to-day, and that of course I will and must be there too,—I hear also the whispered invitation to another and a richer and nobler feast of perfect love and joy and rest; —*perfect because completed.* "For here we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then, face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known."

THE END.

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